NATION

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BUSINESS

Rupee falls 23 paise to hit fresh record low of 85.50

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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PAK ACCUSES INDIA OF 25 LOC VIOLATIONS, WARNS OF ATTACK

Pak claims India carried out several 'false flag ops' & spread misinformation

ISLAMABAD, 27 DEC

The Pakistan Army on Friday accused India of 25 violations of the Line of Control (LoC) during the past year and threatened a quick response if Indian forces attack.

Army spokesman Lt Gen Ahmad Sharif Chaudhry levelled these accusations at an year-end press conference.

The spokesman said security forces killed at least 925 terrorists in 2024 and lost 383 of its own men in nearly 60,000 operations.

The Pakistan military is battling insurgency mostly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.

The general claimed that India carried out several 'false flag operations'.

The term usually refers to fake military action so that the blame falls on the other side.

The spokesman claimed that such operations were always announced through fake social media accounts linked with RAW (Research and Analysis Wing), India's foreign intelligence agency.

"The Pakistan Army possesses the capability to deliver a decisive response to any Indian hostility," he said.

"Indian forces are using brutal tactics to suppress movements for independence," he alleged in an apparent reference mainly to Jammu and Kashmir.

India has repeatedly accused Pakistan of fomenting terrorism in the territory.

He also accused the Indian government of targeting minorities, including Sikhs, both within its borders and abroad.

Chaudhry said that the number of terrorists killed by the country's security forces in 2024 was the highest in the last five years.

Chaudhry said 73 "high-value targets" were also killed, including 27 Afghan nationals, while another 14 high-value terrorists surrendered to the authorities.

The spokesman accused the Afghan Taliban regime of patronising militants, especially those belonging to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

He urged the Afghan authorities to tackle the issue by denying the rebels the use of their soil.

Chaudhry said that a one-document regime has been implemented for those crossing from Afghanistan and illegal border crossing has decreased.

He said the action against illegal Afghans has been going on and so far 8,15,000 of them had been expelled since September 2023.

Chaudhry also said talks were being held with Afghanistan bilaterally as well as through "international friends".

He indirectly blamed jailed former prime minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Imran Khan for the latest wave of militancy. —*PTI*

India has repeatedly accused Pakistan of fomenting terrorism in the territory **PHOTO: PTI**

Tamil Nadu BJP Chief K Annamalai flogs himself as he protests against Tamil Nadu government police over a sexual assault case **PHOTO: PTI**

Anna University rape: BJP's Annamalai whiplashes himself

COIMBATORE, 27 DEC

K Annamalai, the Tamil Nadu BJP chief, staged a provocative self-flogging protest on Friday to condemn the ruling DMK government and the state police for their handling of a sexual assault case involving a Chennai college student on Christmas Eve.

Clad in a green dhoti and bare-chested, Annamalai whipped himself repeatedly in front of his residence in Coimbatore, surrounded by party members holding placards criticising the police for allegedly leaking details of the girl's identity from the FIR. This unusual demonstration follows Annamalai's announcement on Thursday, during a press conference, that he would refrain from wearing shoes until the DMK government is removed from power.

The former IPS officer accused the state police of compromising the victim's privacy. One suspect has been arrested in relation to the incident at Anna University, Tamil Nadu's premier technical institution.

DMK organising secretary RS Bharathi derided Annamalai's actions as farcical, stating, "I doubt if the BJP will accept this whiplash agitation." —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Kannada TV actor Charith Balappa arrested for rape

BENGALURU, 27 DEC

Kannada TV actor Charith Balappa was arrested on Friday by Rajarajeshwari Nagar police on charges of sexual assault, extortion and issuing death threats to a woman in the City. According to the police, the victim has accused Balappa of coercing her into physical relations under the pretext of being in love. The complaint states that Charith broke into the victim's residence, accompanied by associates, and harassed her. He is accused of threatening to release her private photos and videos unless she complied with his demands for money. The woman also accused his mentally torturing and assaulting her. —*Salar News*

RBI allows UPI transactions through 3rd party prepaid apps

MUMBAI, 27 DEC

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced on Friday that holders of prepaid payment instruments (PPIs) will now be able to make and receive Unified Payments Interface (UPI) payments through third-party mobile applications.

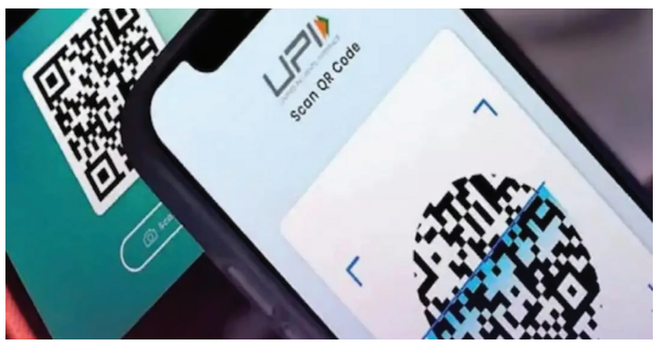
In a circular released by the central bank, it was stated that full-KYC PPI holders will be enabled to link their PPIs to their UPI handles, allowing for transactions via third-party applications. The circular clarified that UPI transactions from PPIs on the issuer's application will require authentication using the existing PPI credentials of customers. This process ensures that transactions are pre-approved before entering the UPI system.

The RBI specified that PPI issuers, in their role as payment system providers, must not onboard customers from any bank or other PPI issuers. This move aims to enhance convenience for PPI holders, which include gift cards, metro rail cards, and digital wallets.

Currently, UPI payments involving bank accounts can be executed using the bank's own application or any third-party provider.

However, payments between PPIs have been restricted to the mobile applications established by their respective issuers.

UPI is an instant real-time payment system developed by the National Payments Corporation of India, designed to facilitate inter-bank transactions through mobile devices. PPIs serve as instruments to aid in the purchase of goods and services, offer financial services, and enable remittance based on stored value. —*PTI*



UPI is an instant real-time payment system developed by the National Payments Corporation of India **PHOTO: X**

PAPER TICKETS AVAILABLE TOO

Metro to run till 2am on New Year Eve

BENGALURU, 27 DEC

Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) on Friday announced extension of metro train timings on the Purple and Green Lines for the New Year's Eve, 2025.

The last train will depart from all terminal stations at 2am on 1 January, 2025, while the final train from Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Metro Station (Majestic) will leave at 2.40am, it said.

Trains will operate at 10 minute intervals from 11pm of 31 December, 2024 up to the extended service period of the day. However, in view of anticipated congregation of crowd on MG Road, MG Road Metro Station will be closed for entry and exit from 11pm on 31 December, 2024. Trains will halt at nearby stations — Trinity and Cubbon Park for use by the commuters. Passengers traveling after 11pm from Trinity or Cubbon Park Metro Stations to any destination have been advised to use a return journey paper ticket priced at Rs 50. "This paper ticket will be available for purchase in advance at all metro stations from 8 AM of 31st December 2024. Normal QR code tickets and cards are also valid for travel from these stations," it stated. To avoid overcrowding at any particular station, the BMRCL advised commuters that those heading towards Whitefield and Silk Institute shall use Trinity Metro Station for boarding, while passengers travelling towards Challaghatta and Madavara shall use the Cubbon Park Station. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: X

8 DEAD AFTER BUS FALLS INTO PUNJAB DRAIN

BATHINDA, 27 DEC

A devastating bus accident in Bathinda on Friday resulted in the deaths of eight individuals and left many others injured. The incident occurred when a private bus, carrying over 45 passengers, crashed through the railing of a bridge and plunged into the Lasara drain near Jeewan Singhwala village.

The bus was en route to Bathinda from Talwandi Sabo when it veered off course. Local residents promptly rushed to the scene to assist the passengers, while police and district administration officials launched a rescue operation to evacuate the injured. Victims were swiftly transported to a nearby hospital for medical treatment. A team from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) also arrived to provide additional support. —*PTI*

CM Siddaramaiah & DyCM DK Shivakumar pay tribute to ex-PM Manmohan Singh in Belagavi on Friday **PHOTOS: SALAR & MOHAMMED ASAD**

7-DAY MOURNING

Manmohan Singh to be cremated today with full state honours

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

The last rites of former prime minister Manmohan Singh will be conducted at 11:45 am Saturday at the Nigambodh Ghat crematorium here with State honours, the Union Home Ministry said.

Several leaders cutting across party lines, including Union ministers and Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi, also paid their tributes to the former two-term prime minister who died on Thursday night

President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were among the top dignitaries who paid homage to Singh at his residence here on Friday.

Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms and a consensus builder in the rough world of politics, died at AIIMS, Delhi, late on Thursday. He was 92. The Union Cabinet at its meeting held under Modi also condoled Singh's passing and hailed him as an eminent statesman and a distinguished leader who left an imprint on national life. During a meeting chaired by Modi, the cabinet observed a two-minute silence and adopted a Condolence Resolution in the memory of Singh. The government has announced a seven-day State mourning as a mark of respect to the former prime minister.

Draped in the Tricolour, Singh's body was brought to his 3, Motilal Nehru Road, residence -- the sprawling bungalow in Lutyens' Delhi that served as his retirement abode for the last over 10 years. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pages 2, 3 & 5

Cong seeks space for memorial

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to conduct the last rites of former prime minister Manmohan Singh at a place where a memorial can be built. He wrote the letter after speaking to Modi about setting up a memorial for Singh, who was a two-term prime minister revered by the people of the country. —*PTI*

Manmohan Singh was my friend and guide: Sonia

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

Describing former prime minister Manmohan Singh's death as a "personal loss", Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) Chief Sonia Gandhi on Friday said he was her friend, philosopher and guide and that in his death, the party has lost a leader who was the epitome of wisdom, nobility and humility.

In her message on Singh's demise, Sonia said he leaves a void in the national life that can never be filled.

"We in the Congress party and the people of India will forever be proud and grateful that we had a leader like Dr Manmohan Singh whose contributions to India's progress and development are immeasurable," she said.

Singh was loved by the people of India for his pure heart and fine mind, Sonia said, adding that his advice, "wise counsel" and views were eagerly sought and deeply valued across the political spectrum in the country. "Respected and admired by leaders and scholars all over the world, he was hailed as a statesman of immense wisdom and stature. Dr Manmohan Singh brought brilliance and distinction to every high office that he held. And he brought pride to India," she said. —*PTI*

Congress leaders Sonia & Rahul Gandhi pay their last respects to Manmohan Singh in New Delhi on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Cong honours Manmohan Singh in Belagavi

DKS said the ex-PM was scheduled to attend centenary session virtually but fell sick

BELAGAVI, 27 DEC

The State Congress unit on Friday paid tributes to former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who died on Thursday, at the site in Belagavi where they planned a mega convention for the centenary celebrations of the 1924 Indian National Congress session presided by Mahatma Gandhi.

Several Congress leaders, including its President Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, attended Thursday's extended Congress Working Committee meeting planned as part of the centenary celebrations.

Following Singh's demise the State Congress cancelled the mega convention named Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan that was scheduled to commence on Thursday. Kharge, Gandhi and several AICC leaders rushed back to Delhi.

Other Congress leaders, including Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister and State Congress chief DK Shivakumar, state ministers and legislators paid floral tributes to Singh's portrait at the venue planned for the mega convention.

CM Siddaramaiah, DyCM DK Shivakumar and other leaders pay tribute to former prime minister Manmohan Singh in Belagavi on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Siddaramaiah said Manmohan Singh was a great economist and very humble human being.

It was Singh who brought in the food security act, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), Right to Education, Right to Information, Siddaramaiah said, "He tried to lift the people of the country socially and economically. He was a cultured, gentlemanly politician. His death is a loss to the entire world." Shivakumar said, KC Venugopal asked him to try and connect Manmohan Singh to the extended Congress Working Committee meeting virtually but former prime minister's office informed him that he was unwell and about to be moved to AIIMS in New Delhi. —*PTI*

> **Manmohan Singh's death is great loss for the nation.He saved country from an economic crisis and prevented it from falling into a debt trap**
>
> -HD Deve Gowda, JD(S) Supremo & former PM

Mansoor Khan remembers 'visionary' Manmohan Singh

BENGALURU, 27 DEC

AICC Secretary Mansoor Ali Khan on Friday paid a heartfelt tribute to former prime minister Manmohan Singh, praising his immense contribution to the nation and his unwavering dedication to uplifting the lives of millions of Indians.

Khan, in a post on X, lauded Singh for his visionary leadership and his role in guiding India through a period of unprecedented growth and development.

In his tribute, Khan described Dr Singh as "a true visionary and a compassionate leader," emphasising the transformative impact of his economic reforms, which laid the foundation for India's rise on the global stage.

"His economic reforms were nothing short of transformative," Khan said, adding, "They paved the way for India's robust growth and international recognition."

What truly set Dr Singh apart, Khan noted, was not only his intellect but his "unwavering integrity and humility."

Despite facing numerous challenges during his tenure, Singh remained a "beacon of hope," always prioritising the welfare of every Indian citizen, he said.

Khan remarked that Dr Singh's leadership was a "testament to the power of service," and his legacy will continue to inspire future generations. "India has lost a giant today, but his spirit will live on in the countless lives he touched and the nation he helped build," Khan added.

"May his soul find eternal peace. Thank you, Dr Singh, for your selfless service and for showing us what true leadership looks like." —*Salar News*

Singh left 'big imprint' on economy: CM

BELAGAVI, 27 DEC

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday said deceased former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has left a "big imprint" on the country's economy. The CM also recalled Singh as a simple, gentleman and honest politician.

"Singh's life, in a way, is a miracle. He was born in a small village in today's Pakistan and went on to become the country's and the world's one of the most renowned economists. He was the finance minister in the Narasimha Rao Cabinet and through liberalisation and privatisation, he opened up the Indian economy, and there by resolved the financial crisis that the country was facing," Siddaramaiah said.

"He is among the honest prime ministers the country has seen. He has left a big imprint on the country's economy. His life and work towards shaping the country's economy is an inspiration to all of us," the CM said. Siddaramaiah said Singh never had the intoxication of power, but he was a simple, gentlemanly and honest politician."He was the most respected man. He lived with dignity and respect in politics. His death is a big loss for India," he said. —*PTI*

DKS vows research centre to honour ex-PM

BELAGAVI, 27 DEC

In the wake of the death of former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Friday said the government will set up a research centre in Bengaluru University campus in honour of the former PM.

"Destiny is not in our hands, but I am proud to say that though Manmohan Singh is no more, he is still alive. His contribution to the nation can't be changed. In Bengaluru University, we will set up a research and study centre for students to learn about Singh's reforms for the country's growth," he said.

Former prime minister and Janata Dal (Secular) leader HD Deve Gowda said Manmohan Singh was a "great leader".

KM Chandrasekhar, former cabinet secretary in Manmohan Singh's Cabinet, said, "His quality is that he made the biggest change that ever happened in the economic history of the country in 1991, but never took credit for it." —*ANI*

Mysuru Palace to not be illuminated till 29 Dec

MYSURU, 27 DEC

The Mysuru Palace Board has decided not to illuminate the historic building on 28 and 29 December to mourn the death of former prime minister Manmohan Singh. The authorities have also cancelled the firecracker display and Mysuru Police band performance on New Year's eve. However, the ongoing flower show at Mysuru Palace would continue till 31 December.

Palace Board Deputy Director TS Subramanya said the decision has been taken in view of the seven-days state mourning declared following the death of the former PM. He also said the Karnataka and English bands' rendition from 11 pm to midnight and the bursting of green crackers it planned on December 31 have been cancelled.Mysuru Palace board organises the winter festival from 21 to 31 December as part of tourism promotion activities.

The past seven days of the festival have received an overwhelming response because of the Christmas and New Year holidays. — *Salar News*

Snehamayi asks Modi, Shah for security cover

BENGALURU, 27 DEC

After the Karnataka government allegedly denied providing security to him and his family, RTI activist Snehamayi Krishna, on whose complaint a case has been registered in the MUDA scam, has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, requesting immediate security assistance from the Centre.

In the letter, he stated that he had filed a complaint regarding the illegal allotment of 14 sites under the Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA) in the name of Parvathi, the wife of Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, along with other political leaders and influential individuals.

"Despite my efforts to lodge a complaint with the relevant authorities, they refused action. As a result, I approached the Court and filed a private complaint. After reviewing my complaint and the supporting documents, the Court directed an investigation by the Lokayukta authorities. Following this, an FIR was registered in the case, with Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah being named Accused No 1," he wrote in the 26 December letter. The RTI activist alleged that, because of the disclosure of this scam, FIRs have been registered against him, and attempts are being made to imprison him. The first FIR was filed at the Nanjanagudu Town Police Station, followed by one each at the Devaraja Police Station and the Krishnaraja Police Station. —*PTI*

Mark gender change in birth certificates: HC

BENGALURU, 27 DEC

The High Court of Karnataka has instructed the Registrar of Births and Deaths to issue modified certificates for transgender individuals who have undergone gender reassignment.

These certificates must reflect both the previous and revised names and genders of the individuals.

This directive will remain effective until necessary amendments are made to the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969, which currently does not allow for making changes in gender on original birth or death certificates.

The high court also urged the Karnataka Law Commission and the state government to review the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, and propose amendments to the 1969 Act and its Rules to align with the intent of the 2019 Act.

Justice Suraj Govindaraj issued these orders while resolving a petition from a 34-year-old transgender woman who had her gender reassignment surgery and sought to update her name and gender on her birth certificate.

The Mangaluru City Corporation's Registrar of Births and Deaths had earlier denied her request, citing the lack of provisions in the 1969 Act. —*PTI*

Priyank's aide behind contractor suicide: BJP Chief

BENGALURU, 27 DEC

BJP State President BY Vijayendra on Friday attacked the Congress, alleging that Bidar-based contractor Sachin was driven to suicide by harassment and threats from minister Priyank Kharge's close aide Raju Kapanur.

Vijayendra said that Sachin left behind a detailed letter highlighting his ordeal.

Coming down heavily on the Congress, the BJP leader said that some ministers are using their close aides and right-hand men to put pressure on people.

"It seems that some ministers in the Congress government have given General Power of Attorney to their right-hand men and close aides. Recently, SDA Rudresh of the Tahsildar's office committed suicide due to harassment by Minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar's close aide, followed by the news of MLA CT Ravi being attacked by a goon at the Suvarna Soudha of the Vidhan Mandal, while today, Sachin, a contractor from Bidar, who was suffering from harassment and threats from Minister @ PriyankKharge's close aide Raju Kapanur, has committed suicide," he posted on X. —*PTI*

Railway police seizes ganja worth Rs 1 crore; 8 arrested

BENGALURU, 27 DEC

Bengaluru police seized ganja worth Rs 1 crore that was being illegally transported into the City from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in the early hours of Friday. Eight individuals were arrested.According to sources, the police intensified checks at all railway stations in the City after receiving credible information about a gang involved in transporting drugs into Bengaluru. Superintendent of Police, Railways Soumyalatha SK said that the contraband was intended for sale to youngsters during New Year celebrations. Police believe drug peddlers are increasingly using trains to smuggle narcotics into the city, bypassing traditional police checkpoints. The seized ganja was packed in trolley bags. —*Salar News*

The seized ganja was packed in trolley bags **PHOTO: SALAR**

SPOKEN BY TRIBALS

200 languages in State endangered

MYSURU, 27 DEC

Kannada Development Authority Chairman Purushottam Bilimale said 230 languages spoken by people of Karnataka, including tribal and indigenous people living in the forests of the state, have been identified as critically endangered.

Bilimale was speaking after inaugurating the six-day Niranthara Rangotsav, a theatre festival which began at Rangayana premises in Mysuru, on Thursday night.

Languages spoken by tribal communities such as Koraga, Badaga, Yerava, Irula, Soliga, Gouli, Jenukuruba and Bettakuruba have been identified as potentially endangered languages in the state. The list also includes Kodava spoken by people of Kodagu district and Tulu spoken in Dakshina Kannada and coastal region.

Most of these spoken languages without any script are dying, Bilimale said. Only three per cent of India's population speaks Kannada, whereas 66 per cent speaks Hindi, he said.

Bilimale also appreciated the medium of theatre for uniting people of all faiths, irrespective of gender, colour and linguistic identities.

Kavitha Ratna, executive director of the Concerned for Working Children, which has been thrice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, also remembered the contributions her late father and veteran theatre personality Na Rathna towards educating the society about the importance of rainwater harvesting, promotion of literacy, eradication of untouchability and promotion of theatre as one of the playwright and former director od Rangayana, Mysore.

Rangayana's former director Janardhan Janny, senior theatre personality Rameshwari Verma, Srinivas Suguna, Prasad Kundur and Prof Kalachannegowda were present. —*Salar News*

Horatti offers to end spat between Hebbalkar, Ravi

HUBBALLI, 27 DEC

Legislative Council Chairman Basavaraj Horatti on Friday offered to intervene in the clash between minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar and member CT Ravi, provided they agree to respect his decision.

Horatti said he has already urged Hebbalkar and Ravi to settle the matter and offered help. He said he has forwarded to the secretary of the Legislative Council a letter from Belagavi police commissioner about a CID inquiry into the case.

The Supreme Court has directed heads of the legislative houses to cooperate with police during special cases, however, police do not have the authority to interrogate them. —*Salar News*

Duped of his land by Cong leader, teacher ends life

BENGALURU, 27 DEC

A 50-year-old government high school teacher, Narasimha Murthy, tragically took his own life, accusing a local Congress leader of fraud and harassment over a disputed land deal. The incident, which occurred in the Byadarahalli police station limits, came to light on Thursday.

Narasimha Murthy, a resident of Hosahalli in Bengaluru, had reportedly owned a piece of land in Tunganagar, Bengaluru Urban, measuring 25 guntas (approximately 1.025 acres). According to a suicide note found during a police inspection of his home, Murthy had entered into an agreement to sell the property to a local Congress leader named Satish for Rs 10 crore. However, the agreement allegedly listed the land's value as just Rs 10 lakh.

Murthy pointed out the discrepancy, and Satish assured him that the remaining amount would be paid soon. Despite repeated follow-ups, Satish is said to have refused to pay the balance and allegedly threatened Murthy with dire consequences. Feeling betrayed and harassed, Murthy took the extreme step, accusing Satish of abetment to suicide in his note. —*Salar News*

Suicide is not the solution. Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support

2 arrested for cheating 200 in X-mas chit funds

KOLAR, 27 DEC

The CEN police in the Kolar Gold Fields (KGF) police arrested three individuals on Friday for running a fraudulent Christmas chit fund scheme and failing to deliver on their promises to the participants. The accused, Revathi Devi, Umesh and Dinesh, reportedly collected Rs 7,200 in monthly instalments of Rs 600 from around 200 people, assuring them that they would provide necessary items before Christmas. However, as the festival approached, the promised items were not delivered, leading to growing dissatisfaction among the participants. The victims filed a complaint with the police, which led to the arrest of the three individuals. Further investigations revealed that this scam was not isolated, and the accused had allegedly cheated over 600 people in and around KGF using similar tactics. —*SalarNews*

3 arrested for stealing from women in Kolar

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 27 DEC

Gauribidanur police in Chikkaballapur arrested three women on Friday involved in a series of thefts targeting other women at crowded places. The accused women stole valuables and cash from their victims, primarily while they were boarding buses at the Gauribidanur bus stand. The police received two complaints earlier this month. One, from Shanthakumari on 16 December, reported the theft of a 50g gold chain by burqa-clad miscreants while she was boarding a KSRTC bus. Another complaint came from Rathnamma, who claimed that over a lakh rupees in cash were stolen from her bag on 6 December at the same bus stand. The cops identified a gang of women targeting female passengers while boarding crowded buses. The arrested women are Rekha Bai, 58, from, Kalaburagi, and Roja, 27, and Kareena, 25. —*Salar News*

Toll in Hubballi fire incident rises to 4

HUBBALLI, 27 DEC

The death toll in the fire incident in Hubballi increased to four on Friday with one more Ayyappa Maladhari (devotee of Lord Ayyappa) 16-year-old Raju Krishna Muge and Lingaraj Siddappa Biranur succumbing to burn injuries while undergoing treatment. Six Ayyappa devotees, who sustained injuries in the fire incident, are currently undergoing treatment at Karnataka Medical College and Research Institute. Home Minister G Parameshwara, who visited the injured at the hospital, said that the fire incident occurred due to a cooking gas explosion. In a post on X, Parameshwara said that he would request compensation for the victims from the Chief Minister's relief fund. Meanwhile, in another incident, three people died and nine were injured after a collision between a sugarcane-loaded truck, a tour travel vehicle and a bike near Gobbur village in Kalaburagi in the State on Wednesday. —*Salar News*

Man kills friend over using phone, flees

BENGALURU, 27 DEC

A construction worker was allegedly killed by his friend following an argument over a mobile phone in the CK Achukattu police station limits. The deceased is Srinivasa, 45, a resident of T Narasipura Taluk in Mysuru. The accused, Nagaraja, also hails from the same taluk. He is absconding after committing the crime. According to police, both Srinivasa and Nagaraja worked as plasterers at a construction site and were sharing a rented accommodation in Srinivasanagar, Katriguppe. They entered into an altercation, when Srinivasa took Nagaraja's mobile phone. As the confrontation escalated, Nagaraja reportedly attacked Srinivasa with a water heater.—*Salar News*

India bids farewell; Leaders gather for Manmohan

Locals recall Singh's efforts for Amritsar, saying UPA govt he headed sanctioned key projects for all

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

Leaders from across the political spectrum including Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu and Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy gathered in the national capital on Friday to pay their last respects to former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh.

Union Ministers Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh, and BJP President JP Nadda also paid their tributes to Singh.

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Akhilesh Yadav also paid their last respects to Singh.

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat and general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale condoled his passing, saying his contributions to Bharat would always be remembered.

Born to Gurmukh Singh and Amrit Kaur on 26 September, 1932 in Gah village of the Punjab of undivided India (now Pakistan), Singh passed his matriculation examination in 1948. His family migrated to Amritsar after Partition in 1948 after living shortly in Haldwani.

Former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh PHOTO: PTI

Singh completed his intermediate and graduation in economics from the Hindu College here before moving out of the city to pursue higher studies in Panjab University's Hoshiarpur campus.

His academic career took him from Punjab to the University of Cambridge, UK, where he earned a First Class Honours degree in Economics. Singh followed this with a DPhil in Economics from Nuffield College of Oxford University.

After migrating to India, the Singh family settled in a small rented house in Amritsar till he graduated.

A few years ago, Singh attended the convocation-cum-alumni meet of the Hindu College in Amritsar as chief guest and interacted with the staff like an ordinary person, reminiscing old memories, retired Hindu College professor Rajinder Loomba said.

Some locals recalled Singh as someone who always took pains for Amritsar, saying the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government he headed sanctioned several projects for the holy city. —*PTI*

Clockwise from top: Prime Minister Narendra Modi; Former Delhi chief minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal; President Droupadi Murmu; LoP in the Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi pay their last respects to former prime minister Manmohan Singh, in New Delhi, on Friday; Manmohan Singh's wife Gursharan Kaur and family at their residence in New Delhi PHOTOS: PTI

Malaysian PM recalls Singh's scholarship offer for his children

SINGAPORE, 27 DEC

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim wrote a moving tribute to Manmohan Singh Friday, recalling how the Indian leader offered scholarships for his children while he was in prison.

On X, he described the former prime minister, who died Thursday, as "the midwife of India's emergence as one of the world's economic giants".

Though Anwar declined the offer, he was clearly moved by the gesture. The Malaysian leader was in jail from 1999 to 2004, when his sentence was overturned. During this period,

PHOTO: X

Singh was Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha.

"In those dark days, as I navigated the labyrinth of imprisonment, he stood by me as a true friend. Such acts of quiet magnanimity defined him, and they will remain etched in my heart. Goodbye, my mitra, my bhai, Manmohan," he wrote. —*PTI*

Cambridge money struggles: Manmohan relied on Cadbury bars, says daughter

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

While studying in Cambridge University on a scholarship in the mid 1950s, money was the only real problem for Manmohan Singh and there were times when he had to skip meals or live on a sixpence bar of Cadbury's chocolate, according to his daughter Daman Singh.

Daughter Daman Singh came out with a book "Strictly Personal: Manmohan and Gursharan", published by HarperCollins in 2014, to tell the "story of her parents".

Manmohan Singh with daughter Daman Singh PHOTO: PTI

Writing about her father's days at Cambridge, Daman said money was the only real problem that bothered him as his tuition and living expenses came to about 600 pounds a year while the Punjab University scholarship gave him about 160 pounds.

"For the rest he had to depend on his father. Manmohan was careful to live very stingily. Subsidised meals in the dining hall were relatively cheap at two shillings sixpence. He never ate out, and seldom indulged in beer or wine," she wrote.

Yet he would be in crisis if money from home fell short or did not arrive in time. "When this happened, he skipped meals or got by on a sixpence bar of Cadbury's chocolate. He would never borrow money his entire life, but this was when he came closest. —*PTI*

Putin recalls Singh's role in elevating India-Russia ties

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday described former prime minister Manmohan Singh as an outstanding statesman and recalled his contribution in elevating India-Russia ties to a 'special and privileged strategic' partnership.

In a condolence message, Putin said Singh accomplished a lot in promoting India's economic development and asserting its interests on the world stage.

The strategic partnership between India and Russia was elevated to the level of 'special and privileged strategic partnership during the visit of the Russian president to India in

PHOTO: PTI

December 2010.

Singh, who served as the prime minister from 2004 to 2014 and widely known as the architect of India's economic reforms, died on Thursday night. He was 92.

"As prime minister and when serving in other high-ranking positions, he accomplished a lot in promoting India's economic development," Putin said. —*PTI*

Put under house arrest, barred from prayers: Umar

SRINAGAR, 27 DEC

Hurriyat Conference chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq on Friday claimed that he was put under house arrest and prevented from offering congregational prayers at the Jamia Masjid here for the fourth consecutive week. Mirwaiz, the chief cleric of Kashmir, alleged that he was barred from offering prayers at the Jama Masjid in the city's Nowhatta locality. There was no word from the police on his allegation. "This is the #4thConsecutiveFriday when I am being stopped from going to Jama Masjid, where people in large numbers eagerly await to participate in majlis e waz," the Mirwaiz said in a post on X. He said while the authorities have power, "I have patience, and creators promise" God is with those who are patient. —*PTI*

Meerabai remarks: Union minister Meghwal says sorry

JAIPUR, 27 DEC

Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal has issued an apology for his remarks about revered poet-saint Meerabai which drew significant backlash on social media. In a video statement issued on Thursday, Meghwal said he has immense respect for Meerabai and "expresses regret and asks for forgiveness" if his words had hurt anybody. Meghwal's comments sparked criticism, particularly from the Rajput community, which demanded an apology from him. During a recent program in Sikar, Meghwal had said that Meerabai was troubled not by her husband but by her brother-in-law, who wanted to marry her after her husband's death. Former minister Pratap Singh Khachariyawas also criticised, calling them disrespectful. —*PTI*

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan at the White House, on Friday PHOTO: PTI

EAM meets Sullivan at White House

SAN FRANCISCO, 27 DEC

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan at the White House during which both the leaders had a wide-ranging discussion on the progress of India-US strategic partnership.

Jaishankar is currently on an official visit to the US during which he is scheduled to meet his US counterpart Antony Blinken and other senior members of the outgoing Biden administration.

"A wide-ranging discussion on the progress of India-US strategic partnership. Also exchanged views on current regional and global developments," Jaishankar said in a post on X on Thursday.

The External Affairs Minister is also likely to have introductory meetings with the senior leadership of the incoming Trump administration.

During his current US visit, from 24 December to 29 December, the top Indian diplomat will also chair a conference of the Consul Generals of India in the US. —*PTI*

2 injured in Manipur gunfight

IMPHAL, 27 DEC

At least two people, including a policeman, were injured in a gunfight with armed men in Manipur's Imphal East district on Friday, police said.

Armed men from the hills launched gun-and-bomb attacks in Sanasabi and Thamnapokpi villages in the district, to which security forces retaliated, leading to a fierce encounter, a senior police officer said.

Two people suffered injuries in the gunfight in Sanasabi village.

The policeman, identified as 37-year-old K Haridash, suffered bullet injuries on his left shoulder and was rushed to Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences around 3.30 pm, the officer said.

He will undergo a minor surgery, officials at the hospital said.

Another 'village volunteer' suffered minor injuries on his hands during the gun battle was also taken to a private hospital, where his condition is out of danger. The village volunteers had joined the security forces in the gun battle against the armed men from the hills.

Locals ran helter-skelter as the gunfight broke out.

Security forces, including CRPF personnel, rescued several women, children and elderly people, who were caught in the crossfire. —*PTI*

IN SAMBHAL

Police outpost to be built near Jama Masjid

SAMBHAL, 27 DEC

Following the violence that erupted in Sambhal on 24 November, the Uttar Pradesh Police is taking measures to enhance security and as part of these efforts, construction of a new police outpost is set to commence in the field opposite Shahi Jama Masjid, officials said Friday.

A survey of the area has already been conducted, and construction will begin soon at the site, located in the Kot Garvi neighbourhood of the city, they said.

"Measurements for the new outpost have been completed," Additional Superintendent of Police Shrish Chandra said.

"The outpost is being established to bolster security in the region. Once completed, it will be manned round-the-clock to ensure a continuous police presence," the officer said.

Four people were killed and several others, including security personnel, were injured in violence that broke out in the Kot Garvi area when some locals clashed with police during a court-ordered survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid over a petition that claimed Harihar temple existed at the site. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

YSRCP, cadres protest over power tariff hike

AMARAVATI, 27 DEC

The Opposition party in Andhra Pradesh, YSRCP, on Friday took out statewide protests and rallies opposing power tariff hikes in the southern state under the TDP-led NDA government.

YSRCP leaders and cadres protested at several places across the state, including Nellore, Chittoor, Krishna, Tirupati, Visakhapatnam, Kakinada, Kurnool.

"Within six months' time, Chandrababu (CM) steeply hiked prices (power tariffs), levying an additional burden of Rs 15,000 crore on the people of the state," said YSRCP.

In Nellore rural constituency, YSRCP leaders A Vijay Kumar Reddy and K Govardhan Reddy participated in the protest. They garlanded a statue of YS Rajasekhar Reddy and then they displayed a video claiming that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu had promised not to hike power tariff.

In Visakhapatnam, former MLA V Ganesh Kumar alleged that Naidu had cheated people and asserted that consumers are not in a position to pay power bills. —*PTI*

'WILL NOT AFFECT LOWER REACHES'

China defends plan for world's largest dam on Brahmaputra in Tibet

BEIJING, 27 DEC

China on Friday defended its plan to build the world's largest dam on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet, saying the project will not "negatively affect" lower riparian states and that safety issues have been addressed through decades of studies.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning played down apprehensions about the massive project to dam the Brahmaputra River, which is called Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet. The project estimated to cost around USD 137 billion is located in the ecologically fragile Himalayan region, along a tectonic plate boundary where earthquakes occur frequently.

Mao said China carried out in-depth studies for decades and took safeguard measures.

China has always been responsible for the development of cross-border rivers, Mao told a media briefing here in response to a question on the concerns related to the dam.

She said the hydropower development there has been studied in depth for decades, and safeguard measures have been taken to ensure the project's security and ecological environment protection.

"The project will not negatively affect the lower reaches," she said referring to the concerns in India and Bangladesh which are the lower riparian states.

China on Wednesday approved the construction of the world's largest dam, stated to be the planet's biggest infra project on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet close to the Indian border, raising concerns in India and Bangladesh.

The hydropower project will be built in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, the Tibetan name for the Brahmaputra River, an official statement here said.

China has already operationalised the USD 1.5 billion Zam Hydropower Station, the largest in Tibet in 2015.

Concerns arose in India as the dam besides empowering China to control the water flow could enable Beijing to release large amounts of water flooding border areas in times of hostilities because of its size and scale.

India too is building a dam over Brahmaputra in Arunachal Pradesh. —*PTI*

The hydropower project will be built in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, the Tibetan name for the Brahmaputra River PHOTO: PTI

Family fued: Surat man kills wife, son; attacks parents

SURAT, 27 DEC

A 34-year-old man stabbed his wife and son to death, attacked his parents and tried to end his own life using a knife over a domestic issue in Surat city of Gujarat on Friday, police said. As per the preliminary probe, the man - Smit Jivani - was disturbed after the family of his uncle, who passed away recently, cut off ties with his family and asked him never to visit their house, Deputy Superintendent of Police Vipul Patel said. Jivani stabbed his wife Hiral, 30, son Chahat, 4, mother Vilasben and father Labhubhai at their residence in Sarthana area of Surat city on Friday morning, said Patel. "We have found that Jivani was mentally disturbed after the family of his deceased uncle snapped ties and asked his family not to visit their house," DySP said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Mumbai Sarpanch's car attacked with petrol-filled condoms

MUMBAI, 27 DEC

A disturbing attack took place in Maharashtra's Dharashiv district, where the windshield of a sarpanch's SUV was smashed and a condom filled with petrol was thrown inside the vehicle. The incident occurred around 10pm on Thursday in Tuljapur, injuring Namdeo Nikam, the sarpanch of Mesai Jawalga, and another passenger. According to police reports, four individuals on two motorcycles approached the SUV, first hurling eggs at the windshield before breaking it with a cement block. They then allegedly empowered their attack by tossing a petrol-filled condom inside the vehicle and splashing the fuel around. Following Nikam's complaint, the Tuljapur police have registered a case under section 110 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, pertaining to an attempt to commit culpable homicide. The motive remains unclear, as Nikam claims to have no known enemies in the area. Investigations are ongoing. *—PTI*

Female tiger cub found dead in MP Tiger Reserve

UMARIA, 27 DEC

A female tiger cub was found dead in the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) in Umaria district of Madhya Pradesh, a forest official said on Friday. Prima facie, the female tiger cub, aged around one-and-a-half years, died because of a fight between big cats. However, the exact cause of the death will be known after the autopsy report, Panpatha Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) Forest, BS Uppal said. The carcass of the female cub was spotted by a tourist in the BTR's Jagua beat on Thursday, after which he alerted the forest staff, he said. *—PTI*

Al pilot suicide: Court grants bail to boyfriend

MUMBAI, 27 DEC

A court here on Friday granted bail to Aditya Pandit, the jailed boyfriend of an Air India pilot who allegedly committed suicide last month. Pilot Srishti Tuli , 25, who lived in a rented flat in the 'Kanakia Rain Forest' building in Marol area, was found dead in the early hours of 25 November. A day later, police arrested Pandit, 27, her boyfriend, and charged him with abetment of suicide under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) section 108. The complaint lodged by Tuli's father said the accused and his daughter were residing in the same room for five-six days prior to her suicide. However, on the day of the incident the accused left for Delhi. However, Pandit's lawyer, Aniket Nikam argued that a case of abetment of suicide was not made out. *—PTI*

J&K: Katra shutdown against ropeway enters 3rd day

Many people join hunger strike for detainees' release

REASI/JAMMU, 27 DEC

People take part in a protest march in Katra, on Friday PHOTO: PTI

The shutdown in Katra against the proposed Vaishno Devi ropeway project entered its third day on Friday, with more people sitting on the hunger to demand the release of those detained during earlier demonstrations.

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti called for a 72-hour shutdown, which began on Wednesday. It announced that all activities in Jammu and Kashmir's Katra would remain suspended during the bandh.

Women and children have now joined the six protesters who began a hunger strike on Wednesday night, demanding the release of 18 Samiti members detained during a protest march against the project earlier that day.

Last month, the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board decided to move forward with a Rs 250-crore passenger ropeway project between Tarakote Marg to Sanji Chhat along the 12-kilometre track to the shrine after shelving the project in the past due to similar protests.

The project will facilitate access to the temple for senior citizens, children and others who find it difficult to climb the track to the cave shrine, it had said.

With black flags displayed across the town, shops, restaurants, and other business establishments remained closed for the third day, and vehicular movement was at a standstill, following the Samiti's call for protest.

The bandh has disrupted normal life in one of India's busiest pilgrimage hubs, which is visited daily by thousands of devotees seeking blessings at the cave shrine.

The proposed Rs 250-crore ropeway project will connect Tarakote Marg to Sanji Chhat, leading to the cave shrine in Reasi district. *—PTI*

Actor Allu Arjun's bail hearing will be on 30 December PHOTO: ANI

Allu Arjun files for bail virtually

HYDERABAD, 27 DEC

Top Telugu actor Allu Arjun, an accused in the case booked over the death of a woman in a stampede here during the premiere of his latest film 'Pushpa-2', appeared through a video conference before a local court on Friday.

Allu Arjun, who was named as accused no 11, also filed a regular bail petition in the court which may come up for hearing on 30 December.

The actor, who was arrested on 13 December in connection with the incident, was produced before the Nampally court, which remanded him to a 14-day judicial custody which ended today. He was to present himself before the court as part of further proceedings and he appeared through video conference.

Shortly after Allu Arjun was shifted to jail, the Telangana High Court granted him interim bail for four weeks and he was released from the jail on 14 December.

A 35-year-old woman died and her eight-year-old son was injured on 4 December during a stampede-like situation at the Sandhya Theatre in Hyderabad when fans jostled to have a glimpse of the actor at the premiere of 'Pushpa 2' movie.

Following the incident, the city police registered a case against Allu Arjun, his security team, and the theatre management under different sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) at the Chikkadpally police station based on the complaint lodged by the deceased woman's family. *—PTI*

Orange alert issued in Delhi, rain causes traffic havoc

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

Delhi's AQI remained at 372, in 'very poor' category PHOTO: PTI

An 'orange' warning was issued in Delhi after rain lashed several parts of the national capital and adjoining areas on Friday, throwing traffic out of gear in many places.

The weather office has forecast more showers during the day.

The rain affected traffic in many areas of south, central and north Delhi.

The weather office said the rain started in Delhi-NCR around 2:30 am.

According to Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) data till 11:30 am, the observatory at Safdarjung -- the national capital's primary weather station -- recorded 9.1 mm rainfall.

The observatory at Palam recorded 8.4 mm rainfall, Lodhi Road (10.8 mm), Ridge (9 mm), Delhi University (11 mm), and Pusa (9.5 mm).

Met officials said an active western disturbance and its interaction with easterly winds were causing light to moderate rainfall and thunderstorms over northwest and central India, including the NCR areas of Delhi.

The Met office -- which has forecast light to moderate rain for the rest of the day -- denotes 'orange' warning as "be prepared".

The national capital recorded a minimum temperature of 11 degrees Celsius, 2.8 notches above normal.

The air quality at 9 am was recorded in the 'very poor' category, with a reading of 372, according to Central Pollution Control Board data.The 24-hour Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded at 345 at 4 pm on Thursday. *—PTI*

Odisha: Ancient Shaiva, Buddhist sculptures found

BHADRAK, 27 DEC

Ancient sculptures, including remnants of Shaiva and Buddhist deities, have been found along the banks of the Baitarani River in Odisha's Bhadrak district, researchers said.

The sculptures were found near a village called Maninathpur in the Bhandaripokhari block of the district earlier this week.

The researchers found 18 ancient sculptures, including rare Shaiva and Buddhist deities, dating back to the 6th or 7th century Common Era (CE).

These artefacts include intricately carved miniature temples and 'argha stupas', they said.

A local youth, Bibekananda, stumbled upon a statue during his morning walk and promptly informed the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) members and young researcher Biswambhar Raut.

Raut inspected the area and identified 18 ancient sculptures and small temples, scattered across the site.

The sculptures depict Shaiva deities like Shiva, Parvati, and Ganesh, and Buddhist icons such as Buddha, Tara, and Padmapani.

The sculptures were handed over to the Buddhist Vihara Museum for preservation and display.

After inspecting the site, renowned archaeologist Sunil Pattnaik confirmed the significance of the artefacts, identifying them as Shaiva and Buddhist sculptures crafted from Khondalite stone, dating to the 6th–8th centuries CE.

The findings are expected to shed light on the syncretic cultural heritage of the region and attract further attention from researchers and historians, the researchers said. *—PTI*

Man who set himself on fire near Parl dies

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

A 26-year-old man has died after setting himself on fire near the Parliament on 25 December. Jitendra, originally from Baghpat in Uttar Pradesh, succumbed to his injuries at Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) Hospital on Friday morning.

Witnesses reported that Jitendra attempted to immolate himself by dousing his body in a petrol-like substance outside the new Parliament building. Quick action from security personnel extinguished the flames, and he was rushed to RML Hospital, where he was admitted to the burns unit.

Preliminary investigations revealed that Jitendra's act was driven by distress related to ongoing disputes with another family in his village, resulting in two assault cases against his family. Police indicated that he had been troubled by the situation. *—PTI*

Delhi docs remove shaving razor from man's stomach

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

A remarkable case underscoring the intersection of mental health and surgical emergencies emerged at a private hospital in Delhi, as doctors successfully treated a 20-year-old man who ingested a razor after a quarrel with his father.

The young man, who has been grappling with depression and suicidal tendencies, swallowed the razor in two parts—the blade holder and the handle—posing a serious threat to his life. Compounding the family's challenges is the fact that his father also suffers from a mental illness. Medical scans revealed that the blade holder was lodged in his stomach, while the handle had progressed to the large intestine.

A team of surgeons, led by Dr Tarun Mittal, conducted a two-step operation. Initially, they performed a laparotomy to remove the blade, followed by a meticulous procedure using sigmoidoscopy to extract the handle from the colon.

Dr Mittal noted the unique nature of the case, emphasising the importance of both medical intervention and sensitivity to mental health issues. Post-surgery, the young man is recovering well and will be referred for counselling to address his mental health. *—ANI*

Meghalaya man booked for chanting 'Jai Shri Ram' in church

SHILLONG, 27 DEC

Meghalaya Police have filed a case against an individual for allegedly offending religious sentiments by trespassing into a church in East Khasi Hills and shouting "Jai Shri Ram" at the altar. The incident occurred on Thursday in Mawlynnong village, where the man reportedly recorded his actions and shared them on social media.

Meghalaya's Chief Minister, Conrad K. Sangma, condemned the incident, describing it as a deliberate act that threatens the peaceful coexistence of the community. He affirmed that the state government is committed to preventing social, religious, and communal discord, assuring that legal measures are being pursued.

Sylvester Nongtynger, Superintendent of Police for East Khasi Hills, confirmed that a case has been registered at the Pynursla police station against a suspect named Akash Sagar, following a complaint by social activist Angela Rangad. Rangad's complaint accuses Sagar of purposely trespassing and disrespecting minority religious practices, which she claims violates constitutional rights of religious freedom.

The Central Puja Committee, a prominent Hindu organisation, expressed its dismay over the incident, calling for stringent action against Sagar. "We condemn this individual's actions and urge the police to enforce the law rigorously," said CPC President Naba Bhattacharjee. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

CULTURE 2024 RECAP

India signed pacts for new national museums

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

An agreement was reached to transform the British-era North and South Blocks into a major museum PHOTO: X

The Ahom dynasty's mound-burial system in Assam received UNESCO recognition during the World Heritage Committee session, marking a significant milestone as India hosted the event for the first time in 2024. As the year concluded, an agreement was reached to transform the British-era North and South Blocks into a major museum.

The culture ministry had a busy year, focusing on the upcoming Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, where plans for a thematic village named 'Kalagram' are set to showcase India's rich spiritual and cultural heritage in early 2025. Major leadership changes occurred, with Gajendra Singh Shekhawat taking over as Union Culture Minister from G Kishan Reddy, who now oversees the coal portfolio.

A significant event was the consecration ceremony of the new Ram temple in Ayodhya, attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 22 January. In February, an exhibition titled 'Chitrakavyam Ramayanam' celebrated the Ramayana at the National Gallery of Modern Art.

In a historic cultural exchange the Archaeological Survey of India launched a revamped website and signed key agreements under 'Adopt a Heritage 2.0' programme.

The highlight of the year was the standoff in July, when India's nomination for the UNESCO World Heritage List was successfully inscribed, making the Ahom dynasty's Moidams the first cultural property from Northeast India to earn this recognition.

As the year drew to a close, the National Museum of India and French Museums Development signed an agreement to transform the North and South Blocks into what is being dubbed the "Yuga Yugeen Bharat National Museum," set to redefine the nation's cultural landscape. *—PTI*

ED raids in case against ex-MP transport official

BHOPAL, 27 DEC

ED on Friday conducted searches at multiple locations in Madhya Pradesh as part of a money-laundering probe against a former transport department official who was recently searched by the Lokayukta police on allegations of possession of disproportionate assets, official sources said.

Federal agency is also probing into a "linked" seizure of gold and cash worth Rs 52 crore from an abandoned SUV.

Raids are being undertaken at about eight premises in state capital Bhopal, Gwalior and Jabalpur. The premises are linked to the family and associates of Saurabh Sharma -- the official under the scanner.

A security team from the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) is assisting the search parties, they said.

The former official and his associates are under the scanner of three probe agencies -- the state Lokayukyta, Income-Tax Department, and Enforcement Directorate.

The Lokayukta police recovered assets worth more than Rs 7.98 crore during the recent searches conducted at locations linked to former official.

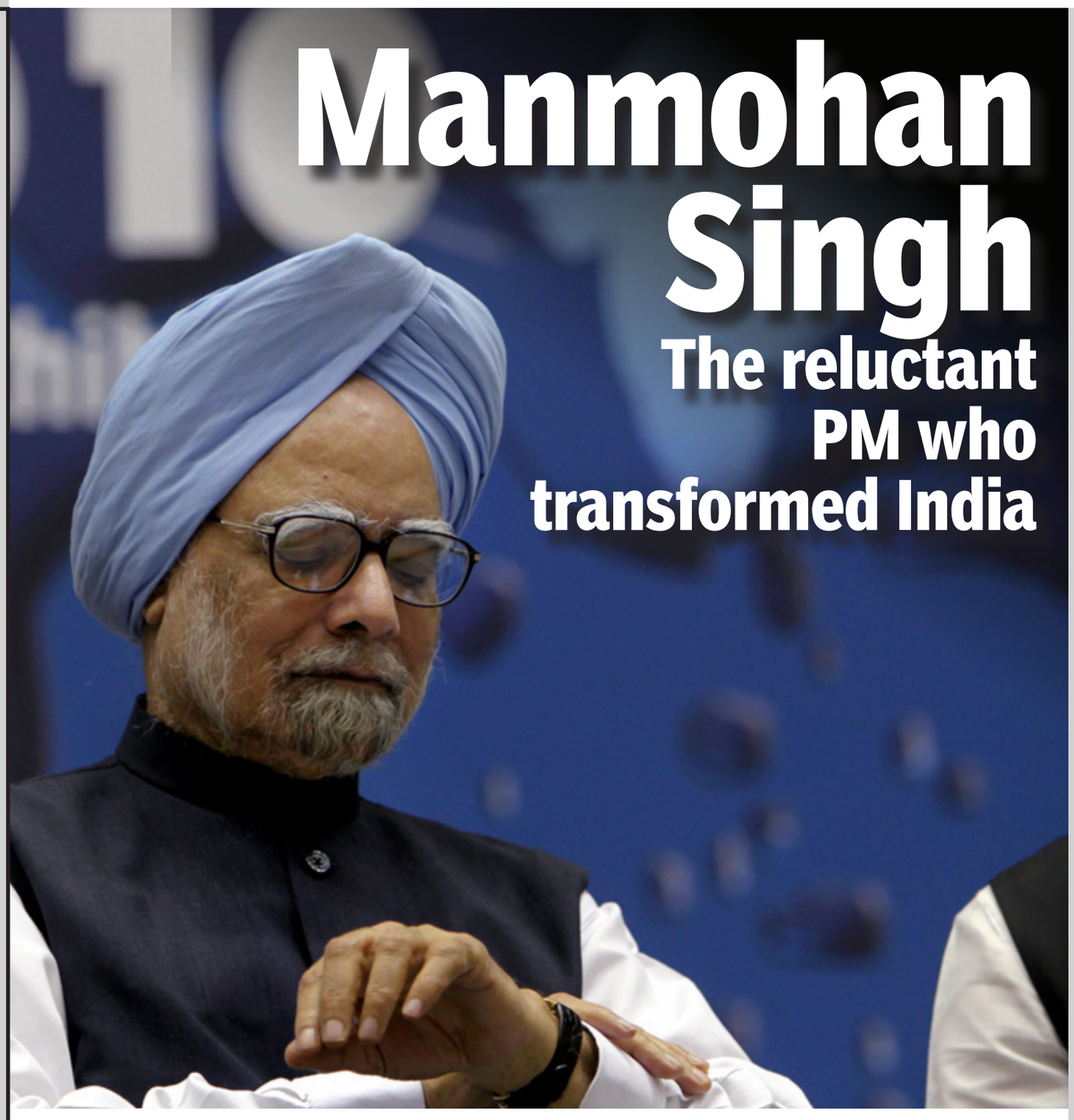
Following this, on 19 December, the Income-Tax Department seized 52 kilogrammes of gold bars worth Rs 40 crore and more than Rs 10 crore in cash from an abandoned SUV in Bhopal.

The sources said the two instances could be "linked and that an investigation is underway to ascertain the facts".

Lokayukta alleged that he earned money through corrupt means, including setting up a school and a hotel in name of his mother, wife, sister-in-law and associates. *—PTI*

Manmohan Singh

The reluctant PM who transformed India



Manmohan Singh's contribution to the development of India will always be remembered. His life was a reflection of his honesty and simplicity. He was a distinguished parliamentarian. His life will always be a lesson on how a person can attain success by rising above deprivation, and struggle

— Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

He was a brilliant economist with a great vision of what India could be, combined with a fine sense of what was possible politically... The liberalisation and reforms he undertook with the support of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao laid the foundations of the modern Indian economy

— Raghuram Rajan, Former RBI Governor

He was a statesman committed to harmony and resolution. I recall our meetings, both during his tenure as prime minister and before, where his sincerity towards dialogue on Kashmir and fostering people-to-people contact across borders was evident

— Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, Hurriyat Conference Chairman

Dr Singh was one of the greatest champions of the US-India strategic partnership, and his work laid the foundation for much of what our countries have accomplished together in the past two decades

—Tony Blinken, US Secretary of State

A great PM, Finance Minister and global statesman who advanced India's interests through bold economic reforms and played a key role in putting India in its rightful place on the world stage and stabilising the global economy after the financial crisis

—Lindy Cameron, British High Commissioner to the India

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

Manmohan Singh, often hailed as the architect of modern India's economic reforms, also championed environmental conservation and climate action during his decade-long tenure as prime minister (2004–2014).

Under his leadership, India launched the National Action Plan on Climate Change, passed the landmark Forest Rights Act (FRA) to protect the rights of tribal communities, and established the National Green Tribunal to safeguard the environment through swift legal action.

For centuries, India's tribal communities were sidelined from decisions about their own land. The UPA-1 government under Singh flipped that script.

His government passed the Forest Rights Act in 2006, handing back control of forests to the people who lived in and protected them.

Around 25 lakh land titles, including over 23.7 lakh individual titles, have been granted so far to Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers under the FRA.

In July 2008, Singh urged all chief ministers to act swiftly to grant tribals their rights over forest land.

In 2008, the Manmohan Singh government delivered the NAPCC, an eightfold strategy to tackle global warming. The NAPCC's eight core missions include the National Solar Mission, which laid the groundwork for the country to emerge as a global clean energy leader, and the Green India Mission, which focuses on improving biodiversity, restoring degraded lands, and enhancing climate resilience.

Singh strongly advocated for climate justice. Speaking at the Washington office of the Council on Foreign Relations on 23 November, he made it clear that India wouldn't accept unfair carbon shackles. "India was a latecomer to industrialisation. And as such, we have contributed very little to the accumulation of greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming. But we are determined to be part of the solution to the problem. We are willing to work towards any solution that does not compromise the right of developing countries to develop and lift their population out of poverty," he said.

Under Singh's watch, India set up the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in 2010 to fast-track environmental justice. Over the years, the NGT became the watchdog India needed for delivering speedy judgments on critical issues like pollution, deforestation, and wildlife conservation.

Unassuming, erudite, soft-spoken, and a consensus builder, Singh died on Thursday night at Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). He was 92.

The Congress leader, who steered the country for 10 years from 2004–2014 and helped set up the country's economic framework as Finance Minister before that, was a renowned name in the global financial and economic sectors. —*PTI*

PLEASE BE LENIENT: MANMOHAN SINGH SHIELDED JNU PROTESTERS

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

Erudite and soft-spoken, former prime minister Manmohan Singh developed his reputation as a consensus builder during his stint as the finance minister who opened the doors for economic reform in India.

But it was his intervention to prevent the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) administration from acting against students who had held a protest against him in 2005 that showcased a fresh dimension of his persona.

Visiting the JNU campus to unveil a statue of former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Singh was shown black flags by Left-backed students.

The incident led to the university issuing show-cause notices to the students, with a few of them even being detained by the Delhi Police. A day later, Singh intervened, suggesting to the then vice-chancellor BB Bhattacharya to be lenient with the students. During his visit to the campus, known for its strong anti-establishment stance, Singh had quoted the French philosopher Voltaire, saying, "'I may disagree with what you have to say but I shall defend to the death your right to say it". —*PTI*

Former president Dr APJ Abdul Kalam and ex-PM Manmohan Singh ***PHOTO: PTI***

MANMOHAN SINGH'S POETIC SIDE

A leader of reserve and quiet dignity, former prime minister Manmohan Singh had a keen taste for Urdu verses, and his poetic banters with BJP leader Sushma Swaraj in Lok Sabha are among the most viewed parliamentary debates on social media.

During a fierce debate in Parliament in 2011, the-then Lok Sabha Opposition leader Swaraj deployed Varanasi-born poet Shahab Jafri's 'sher' to fire a salvo at prime minister Singh, whose government was beginning to be mired in corruption charges.

She said during the debate, "'Tu idhar udhar ki na baat kar, yeh bata ki kafila kyun luta, humein rahjano se gila nahi, teri rahbari ka sawal hai (Instead of talking about irrelevant issues, tell us why the caravan was looted. I have no complaint against the robbers but I question your leadership)'." Instead of meeting fire with fire, Singh -- in his very own unassuming way -- invoked Allama Iqbal's disarming lines to bring down the roof.

He said, "'Mana ki teri deed ke kaabil nahin hoon main, tu mera shauq dekh mera intezar dekh (Agreed I am not worthy of drawing your sight. But look at my zeal, my longing)'." Singh had resorted to a similar poetic response when reporters quizzed him on corruption charges besetting his government. He had said, "'Hazaro jawabon se achchhi hai meri khamoshi, jo kayi sawalo ki aabru dhak leti hai (My silence is better than thousands of questions, or it will expose many of the questions)'."

Tibetan Spiritual leader Dalai Lama with former PM Manmohan Singh in New Delhi on 22 Sept, 2014 ***PHOTO: PTI***

HOW HE DEFENDED LANDMARK 1991 BUDGET

Manmohan Singh had to literally face a trial-by-fire to ensure widespread acceptance of his path-breaking 1991 Union Budget that saw the nation rise from its darkest financial crises.

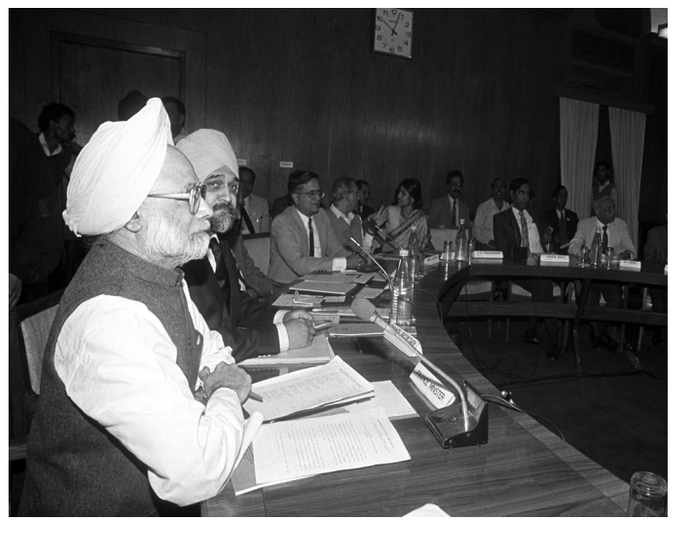
Singh, the newly-appointed finance minister in the PV Narasimha Rao-led government, did it with great elan -- from facing journalists at a post-budget press conference to irate Congress leaders unable to digest the wide-ranging reforms at the parliamentary party meeting. Singh's historic reforms not only rescued India from near bankruptcy but also redefined its trajectory as a rising global power.

Singh made an unscheduled appearance at a press conference on 25 July, 1991, a day after the presentation of the Union Budget, "to ensure that the message of his budget did not get distorted by less-than-enthusiastic officials", Congress leader Jairam Ramesh wrote in his book 'To the Brink and Back: India's 1991 Story' that recounts the fast-paced changes that took place after Rao became prime minister in June 1991.

"The finance minister explained his budget -- calling it 'a budget with a human face'. He painstakingly defended the proposals to increase fertiliser, petrol and LPG prices," Ramesh recounted in the book published in 2015.

Ramesh was an aide to Rao during his initial months in office. Sensing the disquiet in Congress ranks, Rao called a meeting of Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) on 1 August, 1991, and decided to allow party MPs to "vent their spleen freely". "The PM stayed away and allowed Manmohan to face the flak," Ramesh wrote.

Only two MPs -- Mani Shankar Aiyar and Nathuram Mirdha -- backed HIM . Bowing to pressure from the party, Singh had agreed to lower the 40 per cent increase in fertiliser prices to 30 per cent but had left the hike in LPG and petrol prices untouched.



The then finance minister Manmohan Singh during a meeting with industrialists on 22 Nov, 1994 ***PHOTO: PTI***

AHEAD OF POLLS

Manmohan Singh had chastised Modi for spreading hate

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

His delicate health notwithstanding, the politician in former prime minister Manmohan Singh came out sharply during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections when he accused his successor Narendra Modi of lowering the dignity of public discourse and the gravity of the office of the prime minister by delivering "hateful speeches" during the poll campaign.

In an appeal to voters in Punjab ahead of the seventh phase of the Lok Sabha polls on 1 June, Singh had asserted that only Congress could ensure a growth-oriented progressive future where democracy and the Constitution would be safeguarded.

He had also hit out at BJP government for imposing an "ill-conceived" Agnipath scheme, which he termed as a threat to national security.

"The BJP thinks that the value of patriotism, bravery and service is only four years. This shows their fake nationalism," he had said in what is considered as his last letter to voters of Punjab.

Congress had released Singh's letter on 30 May.

Singh had said those who trained for regular recruitment were woefully betrayed by the Modi regime.

He had said, "The youth of Punjab, the son of the farmer, who dreams of serving the motherland through the Armed Forces, is now thinking twice about getting recruited only for a four-year stint. The Agniveer scheme endangers national security."

"No prime minister in the past has uttered such hateful, unparliamentary and coarse terms, meant to target either a specific section of the society. He has also attributed some false statements to me. I have never in my life singled out one community from the other. That is the sole copyright of the BJP," he had said.

"People of India are seeing through all of this. This narrative of dehumanisation has now reached its peak. It is now our duty to save our beloved nation from these forces of discord," Singh had said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with ex-PM Manmohan Singh ***PHOTO: PTI***

He had appealed to the voters to give love, peace, fraternity and harmony a chance in India and urged the voters in Punjab to vote for development and inclusive progress.

"I appeal to all the young minds to exercise caution and vote for a brighter future," Singh had said.

Modi had accused Singh of saying that Muslims had the first right on the country's resources. Lauding Punjabis as warriors, he had said they were known for their spirit of sacrifice and indomitable courage and innate belief in the democratic ethos of inclusiveness, harmony, amity and brotherhood could protect our great nation. "In the past 10 years, the BJP government has left no stone unturned in castigating Punjab, Punjabis and Punjabiyat. 750 farmers, mostly belonging to Punjab, were martyred while incessantly waiting at Delhi borders, for months together.

As if the lathis and the rubber bullets were not enough, none less than the prime minister verbally assaulted our farmers by calling them 'andolanjeevis' and 'parjeevi (parasites)' on the floor of Parliament. Their only demand was the withdrawal of the three farm laws imposed on them without consulting them," he had said. —*PTI*

MANMOHAN SINGH PREFERRED HIS MARUTI OVER BMW

Even when serving as prime minister, Manmohan Singh preferred his modest Maruti Suzuki 800 over a luxury BMW as it reaffirmed his connection with the middle class and commitment to work for the common man. Singh's humility and grounded nature were highlighted in a heartfelt social media memoir by Uttar Pradesh Minister of State for Social Welfare (Independent Charge) Asim Arun. Arun served as Singh's close protection officer for nearly three years during his tenure as a Special Protection Group officer. Arun recalled Singh telling him, "Asim, I don't like travelling in this car (BMW). My car is the Maruti." Arun said he would explain the security requirements of the high-tech BMW to Singh but the former prime minister's gaze would always turn to the Maruti.

MANMOHAN SINGH'S SPECIAL BOND WITH AMRITSAR

Former PM Manmohan Singh shared a special bond with the holy city of Amritsar, where he spent his growing up years. Born at Gah in Punjab province which now falls in Pakistan's Chakwal before his family migrated to Amritsar after Partition, Singh completed his schooling from Amritsar and did his graduation in economics from the Hindu College here. Singh's half-brother from his extended family, Surjit Singh Kohli, who ran a readymade garment business in Amritsar, said the former prime minister had deep affection for his grandmother who raised him following his mother's death when he was very young. "He used to visit the Golden Temple every time he came to the holy city," Surjit Kohli said.

Germany's Parl dissolved, nation to vote on 23 February

FRANKFURT, 27 DEC

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier on Friday ordered parliament dissolved and set new elections for 23 February in the wake of the collapse of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's governing coalition. Scholz lost a confidence vote on 16 December and leads a minority government after his unpopular and notoriously rancorous three-party coalition collapsed on 6 November when he fired his finance minister in a dispute over how to revitalise Germany's stagnant economy. Leaders of several major parties then agreed that a parliamentary election should be held on 23 February, seven months earlier than originally planned. Since the post-World War II constitution doesn't allow the Bundestag to dissolve itself, it was up to Steinmeier to decide whether to dissolve parliament and call an election. He had 21 days to make that decision. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

LeT leader Makki involved in 26/11 attack dies

LAHORE, 27 DEC

Mumbai attacks alleged mastermind Hafiz Saeed's brother-in-law and banned Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) deputy chief Hafiz Abdul Rahman Makki died of heart attack here on Friday. According to the JuD, Prof Abdul Rahman Makki had been ill for the past few days and was undergoing treatment following high diabetes at a private hospital in Lahore."Makki suffered a cardiac arrest and he breathed his last in the hospital," a JuD official told PTI.Makki, the brother-in-law of JuD chief Hafiz Saeed, was handed down six months imprisonment in terror financing in 2020 by an anti-terrorism court. *—PTI*

Pak army officer dies, 13 terrorists killed in Khyber

PESHAWAR, 27 DEC

A Pakistani army officer died and 13 terrorists were killed in three separate operations conducted by security forces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the military's media wing has said.All the operations took place in the early hours of Thursday, it said. In the first operation, security forces targeted terrorists in the Jani Khel area of Bannu district, killing two terrorists. A second operation in North Waziristan resulted in the neutralisation of five terrorists, with eight others injured. However, Major Muhammad Awais, 31, was killed in the gun battle. In the third operation, security forces engaged terrorists in South Waziristan, killing six and injuring eight others. The military emphasised its commitment to eliminating terrorism, saying, "Sanitisation operations are being carried out to eliminate any other kharji (militants) found in the area.." *—PTI*

Judge lets Jay-Z rape accuser stay anonymous

NEW YORK, 27 DEC

An Alabama woman who says she was raped by Jay-Z and Sean "Diddy" Combs when she was 13 can proceed anonymously, for now, in her lawsuit against the rap moguls, a judge ruled Thursday.In her written order, Judge Analisa Torres also chastised the lawyer representing Jay-Z for what she described as his combative motions and "inflammatory language" against the plaintiff's lawyer, calling them inappropriate. The Manhattan jurist said the woman can proceed anonymously at this early stage of the litigation, but she may be required to reveal her identity at a later date, if the case proceeds. That would allow defence lawyers to collect facts necessary to prepare for trial. Torres also cited "substantial interest" from the public. *—PTI*

N Korean troops face heavy casualty in Russia: Ukraine

Report also highlights supply issues drinking water crunch

KYIV, 27 DEC

North Korean troops are suffering heavy losses in the fighting in Russia's Kursk region and facing logistical difficulties as a result of Ukrainian attacks, Ukraine's military intelligence has said.

The intelligence agency, known under its acronym GUR, on Thursday said Ukrainian strikes near Novoivanovka inflicted heavy casualties on North Korean units. It said North Korean troops also faced supply issues and even shortages of drinking water.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said earlier that 3,000 North Korean troopers have been killed or wounded in the Kursk region. It marked the first significant estimate by Ukraine of North Korean casualties several weeks after Kyiv announced that North Korea had sent 10,000 to 12,000 troops to Russia to help it in the almost 3-year war.

The casualty disclosure came as the Biden administration was pressing to send as much military aid as possible to Ukraine before President-elect Donald Trump takes over in January.

Russia attacked Ukraine with 31 exploding drones **PHOTO: X**

Ukrainian forces launched an incursion into the Kursk region in August, dealing a significant blow to Russia's prestige and forcing it to deploy some of its troops from eastern Ukraine, where they were pressing a slow-moving offensive.

The Russian army was able to reclaim some territory in the Kursk region from Ukrainian forces, but has failed to fully dislodge them.

At the same time, Russia has sought to break Ukraine's resistance with waves of strikes with cruise missiles and drones against Ukraine's power grid and other infrastructure. The latest attack on Christmas morning involved 78 missiles and 106 drones, striking power facilities, Ukraine's air force said. It claimed to have intercepted 59 missiles and 54 drones and jammed 52 other drones. On Thursday, Russia attacked Ukraine with 31 exploding drones.

Twenty were shot down, and another 11 did not reach their target due to jamming, the Ukrainian air force said. *—PTI*

'Russian air defence fire led to crash of Azerbaijan plane'

BAKU, 27 DEC

Aviation experts on Thursday said that Russian air defence fire was likely responsible for Wednesday's Azerbaijani plane crash that killed 38 people and left all 29 survivors injured.

Azerbaijan Airlines' Embraer 190 was en route from capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus on Wednesday when it was diverted for reasons still unclear and crashed while making an attempt to land in Aktau in Kazakhstan after flying east across the Caspian Sea.

The plane went down about 3km from Aktau. Video footage circulating online appeared to show the aircraft making a steep descent before crashing into the ground and exploding in a fireball.

Other footage showed a part of its fuselage ripped away from the wings and the rest of the aircraft lying upside down on the grass. *—PTI*

CRISIS DEEPENS

After Yeol, South Korea impeaches acting president

SEOUL, 27 DEC

South Korea's opposition-controlled National Assembly on Friday voted to impeach acting President Han Duck-soo despite vehement protests by governing party lawmakers, further deepening the country's political crisis set off by President Yoon Suk Yeol's stunning imposition of martial law and ensuing impeachment.

Han's impeachment means he will be stripped of the powers and duties of the president until the Constitutional Court decides whether to dismiss or reinstate him. The court is already reviewing whether to uphold Yoon's earlier impeachment.

The impeachments of the country's top two officials worsen its political turmoil, deepen its economic uncertainty and hurt its international image.

The National Assembly passed Han's impeachment motion with a 192–0 vote. Lawmakers with the governing People Power Party boycotted the vote and gathered around the podium where assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik was seated and shouted that the vote was "invalid" and demanded Woo's resignation.

The PPP lawmakers protested after Woo called for a vote on Han's impeachment motion after announcing its passage required only a simple majority in the 300-memer assembly, not a two-thirds majority as claimed by the PPP. Most South Korean officials can be impeached by the National Assembly with a simple majority vote, but a president's impeachment needs the support of two-thirds. There are no specific laws on the impeachment of an acting president.

Han's powers will be officially suspended when copies of his impeachment document are delivered to him and the Constitutional Court. Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok will take over. *—PTI*

US forces retraction of report on famine in Gaza

WASHINGTON, 27 DEC

A lead organisation monitoring for food crises around the world withdrew this week a new report warning of imminent famine in north Gaza under what it called Israel's "near-total blockade", after the US asked for its retraction, US officials said.

The move follows public criticism of the report from the US ambassador to Israel Jacob Lew.

The rare public challenge from the Biden administration of the work of the US-funded Famine Early Warning System, which is meant to reflect the data-driven analysis of unbiased experts, drew accusations from aid and human-rights figures of possible US political interference.

A finding of famine would be a public rebuke of Israel, which has insisted that its 15-month war in Gaza is aimed against the Hamas militant group and not against its civilian population.

Lew called the warning inaccurate and "irresponsible".

Humanitarian and human rights officials expressed fear of US political interference in the world's monitoring system for famines **PHOTO: X**

Lew and the US Agency for International Development, which funds the monitoring group, both said the findings failed to properly account for rapidly changing circumstances in north Gaza.

Humanitarian and human rights officials expressed fear of US political interference in the world's monitoring system for famines. The US Embassy in Israel and the State Department declined comment. FEWS officials did not respond to questions.

"We work day and night with the UN and our Israeli partners to meet humanitarian needs — which are great — and relying on inaccurate data is irresponsible," Lew said Tuesday.

USAID confirmed that it had asked the famine-monitoring organization to withdraw its stepped-up warning issued in a report dated Monday. *—PTI*

Canadian ministers head to talks with Trump

TORONTO, 27 DEC

Two top Canadian Cabinet ministers are visiting Palm Beach to talk border security and trade with the incoming Donald Trump administration as Trump threatens tariffs on all Canadian products.

New Finance Minister Dominic LeBlanc and Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly will be in Palm Beach, Florida on Thursday for the talks this week, said Jean-Sébastien Comeau, a spokesman for LeBlanc.

LeBlanc said last week he would meet with Tom Homan, Trump's incoming "border czar," after Christmas to discuss Canada's plan to secure the border as part of a bid to avoid the sweeping tariffs.

Comeau said LeBlanc and Joly "look forward to building on the discussions that took

place when the Prime Minister met with President Trump at Mar-a-Lago last month, as well as the positive call the Ministers held with Mr Tom Homan earlier this month." "The Ministers intend to focus on Canada's efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking and illegal migration and the measures outlined in Canada's Border Plan, as well as the negative impacts that the imposition of 25 per cent tariffs on Canadian goods would have on both Canada and the United States," Comeau added. *—PTI*

Hindus in Ohio to get holiday on Deepavali

SAN FRANCISCO, 27 DEC

Hindu students in Ohio will be getting a holiday for Deepavali and two other Hindu holidays per school year, an Indian American State legislator has announced.

A bill co-sponsored by Indian American Senator Niraj Antani that was passed by State Legislation has now been passed by Ohio Governor Mike Dewine.

"This makes us the 1st state in American history to give every student Diwali School off as a holiday," said Antani, who is the 1st Hindu American State Senator in Ohio history and the youngest Hindu American state or federal elected official in the nation. *—PTI*

China's new ship can launch jets

BANGKOK, 27 DEC

China launched a new amphibious assault ship Friday, capable of launching fighter jets and designed to strengthen the navy's combat ability in distant seas.

The Sichuan, the first ship of the 076 type, is China's largest such ship yet, displacing 40,000 tons and equipped with an electromagnetic catapult which will allow fighter jets to launch directly off its deck, Xinhua news agency reported.

The ship is designed to launch ground troops in landing crafts and provide them with air support.

Developed by Chinese researchers, it's also equipped with an "arrestor technology"

The first ship of the Chinese Navy's 076 amphibious assault ship was launched in Shanghai on Friday **PHOTO: X**

which allows fighter jets to land on its deck.

China's first amphibious assault ships, the type 075, launched in 2019.

China's People's Liberation Army Navy, or PLAN, has been working on modernising its forces for more than a decade. *—PTI*

BOOST FOR DEFENCE

Japan to use $55B for strike-back power

TOKYO, 27 DEC

- Japan is preparing to deploy US-made Tomahawks late in the fiscal year 2025.

The Japanese Cabinet on Friday approved a record 8.7trn yen ($55B) defence budget for 2025 as the country accelerates building up its strike-back capability with long-range cruise missiles and starts deploying Tomahawks to fortify itself against growing threats from China, North Korea and Russia.

The Cabinet-endorsed draft defence budget marks the third year of Japan's ongoing five-year military buildup under the national security strategy adopted in 2022. The defense spending is part of the more than 115trn yen ($730B) national budget bill – also a record – that requires parliamentary approval by March to be enacted.

Japan is preparing to deploy US-made Tomahawks late in the fiscal year 2025 as part of its ongoing effort to acquire strike-back capability with long-range missiles that can hit distant targets. The budget allocates 940B yen ($6B) for the so-called "standoff" defence system that also includes long-range missiles, satellite constellation and other arsenals.

The cost includes 1.8B yen ($11.4M) for the purchase and addition of equipment to launch Tomahawks from an Aegis-class destroyers.

In order to reinforce its missile defence system, Japan plans to spend another 533B yen ($3.37B) that includes purchases of interceptors and a mobile reconnaissance radar to be placed on Okinawa. *—PTI*

Croatia's Prez seeks re-poll against conservative rival

ZAGREB, 27 DEC

Croatia's Left-leaning President, an outspoken critic of Western military support for Ukraine in its war against Russia, is running for re-election this weekend against an array of contenders, including the candidate backed by the conservative government.

President Zoran Milanovic is seen as a favourite ahead of the presidential election on Sunday, though he is unlikely to score an outright victory. If none of the eight contenders gain more than half of the ballots cast in the first round, a runoff between the top two will be held on 12 January.

The most popular politician in Croatia, 58-year-old Milanovic had served as prime minister in the past. Populist in style, Milanovic has been a fierce critic of current Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and a continuous sparring of the two has lately marked

Zoran Milanovic **PHOTO: X**

Croatia's political scene.

Ahead of Sunday's vote, Plenkovic's Hrvatska Democratska Zajednica party, or Croatian Democratic Union party has backed pediatrician and university professor Dragan Primorac for the presidency. Primorac has sought

CLIMATE CRISIS

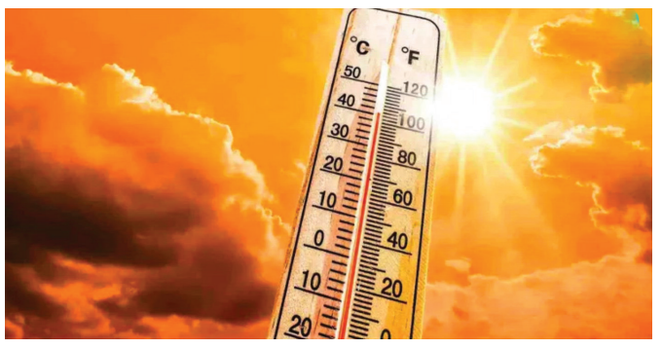
World faced extra 41 hot days in 2024

WASHINGTON, 27 DEC

People around the world suffered an average of 41 extra days of dangerous heat this year because of human-caused climate change, according to a group of scientists who also said that climate change worsened much of the world's damaging weather throughout 2024.

The analysis from World Weather Attribution and Climate Central researchers comes at the end of a year that shattered climate record after climate record as heat across the globe made 2024 likely to be its hottest ever measured and a slew of other fatal weather events spared few.

"The finding is devastating but utterly unsurprising. Climate change did play a role, and often a major role in most of the events we studied, making heat, droughts, tropical cyclones and heavy rainfall more likely and more intense across the world, destroying lives and livelihoods of millions and often uncounted numbers of people," said Friederike Otto, the lead of World Weather Attribution and an Imperial College climate scientist.



Earth experienced some of the hottest days ever measured and its hottest-yet summer **PHOTO: X**

"As long as the world keeps burning fossil fuels, this will only get worse," Otto told media persons.

Millions of people endured stifling heat this year. Earth experienced some of the hottest days ever measured and its hottest-yet summer, with a 13-month heat streak that just barely broke.

- Millions of people endured stifling heat this year. Earth experienced some of the hottest days ever measured and its hottest-yet summer, with a 13-month heat streak that just barely broke.

To do its heat analysis, the team of volunteer international scientists compared daily temperatures around the globe in 2024 to the temperatures that would have been expected in a world without climate change. The results are not yet peer-reviewed, but researchers use peer-reviewed methods. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Gold jumps ₹350; silver surges ₹900

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

Gold prices jumped Rs 350 to Rs 79,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday on the back of continued buying by jewellers and depreciation in the rupee, according to All India Sarafa Association. Traders said the safe-haven asset is also strengthened by escalating geopolitical tensions stemming from the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and tensions in the Middle East. The yellow metal on Thursday settled at Rs 78,850 per 10 grams. Rallying for the fourth straight session, silver also surged Rs 900 to Rs 91,700 per kg. During the holiday-shortened week, the white metal soared Rs 3,550 per kg in the past four sessions. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity increased Rs 350 to Rs 78,800 per 10 grams from previous close of Rs 78,450 on Thursday. *—PTI*

JSW Energy appoints Koshy as EVP-Head Thermal

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

JSW Energy on Friday announced that its board has approved appointment of Feby Koshy as the Executive Vice President - Head of Thermal. His appointment is effective from 30 December, JSW Energy said in an exchange filing. The board has approved his name on the recommendation of the Compensation & Nomination and Remuneration Committee for the post of Executive Vice President - Head of Thermal, a senior management personnel of the company, it said. Koshy comes with over 32 years of experience in the power sector. He has also worked with JSW Energy for about 13 years and was the technical head of the 1,200 MW greenfield power project at the Ratnagiri plant. *—PTI*

Dream debut for Mamata Machinery; shares surge 147%

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

Shares of packaging machinery manufacturer Mamata Machinery Ltd made a remarkable debut on Friday, listing with a huge premium of nearly 147 per cent, against the issue price of Rs 243. On the BSE, shares of the firm listed at Rs 600, a jump of 146.91 per cent. It further zoomed 159.23 per cent to Rs 629.95. The stock began the trade at Rs 600 on the NSE. The firms' market valuation stood at Rs 1,550.17 crore. The initial public offering of Mamata Machinery Ltd fetched a whopping 194.95 times subscription on the final day of share sale on Monday. The Rs 179-crore initial share sale had a price range of Rs 230-243 per share. The Gujarat-based company's initial share sale was entirely an Offer-for-Sale (OFS) of 73.82 lakh equity shares by promoters worth Rs 179.38 crore at the upper end of the price band. Since it was an OFS, the company will not receive any proceeds from the public issue, and the entire fund will go to the selling shareholders. *—PTI*

NTPC REL starts 37.5 MW solar supply from Sadla

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

Power giant NTPC on Friday said its step-down arm, NTPC Renewable Energy Ltd (NTPC REL), has begun commercial supply of electricity from a first part capacity of 37.50 MW out of 200 MW of Gujarat Solar PV Project in Sadla from 21 December. With this, the total installed and commercial capacity of the NTPC group has now become 76,598.18 MW, the NTPC stated in a regulatory filing. The NTPC has planned to have 50 per cent non-fossil fuel-based electricity generation capacity in its portfolio by 2032. The NTPC has planned to have 60 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2032.*—PTI*

Rupee falls 23 paise to hit fresh record low of 85.50

It fell steepest in 2 years amid demand from banks & importers

MUMBAI, 27 DEC

The rupee fell steepest in almost two years to hit its lifetime intraday low of 85.80 before a suspected central bank intervention helped recover some of its losses and settled 23 paise lower at a record low of 85.50 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday due to a strong greenback amid increased month-end demand from banks and importers.

According to analysts, the Reserve Bank's stance to hold on to its dollar payments in short-term forward contracts added to the shortage of greenback, with importers rushing to meet their month-end payment obligations.

Despite robust sentiment in domestic equity markets, the rupee was weighed down by sustained outflow of foreign funds and rising crude oil prices, they added.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened weak at 85.31 and plunged 53 paise PHOTO: X

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened weak at 85.31 and plunged 53 paise to the lowest-ever intraday level of 85.80.

The unit finally ended the session at 85.50 (provisional) against the greenback, losing 23 paise from its previous closing level of 85.27.

The rupee's earlier sharpest one-day fall of 68 paise was recorded on February 2, 2023.

The domestic unit has been hitting new lows almost every day in the past couple of weeks.

It had plunged 12 paise to 85.27 against the dollar on Thursday after declining 13 paise in the previous two sessions.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.04 per cent at 107.94, while the 10-year benchmark US Treasury yield rose 0.76 per cent, hitting its seven-month high level of 4.61 per cent. *—PTI*

AFTER BIRLA'S ACQUISITION

UltraTech to buy ₹851 cr stake in Star Cement

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, 27 DEC

Leading cement producer UltraTech Cement on Friday said it will acquire a minority stake of 8.69 per cent from the promoters of Meghalaya-based Star Cement in a deal worth up to Rs 851 crore.

UltraTech Cement will by pick up stakes from Rajendra Chamaria and his family's holdings, part of the promoter group, sources told PTI.

Only the Chamaria family is selling its stake in the company, while other promoters who control Century Ply remain committed and are not divesting any shares, the sources said.

Rajendra Chamaria, when asked for comments, did not deny the development but refrained from divulging further details.

According to the latest shareholding data, the total stake of all promoter shareholders with the surname Chamaria stands at 11.25 per cent.

The development comes three days after the Aditya Birla group firm completed the acquisition of a controlling stake in India Cements Ltd, turning the south-based company into its subsidiary.

The firm is expanding its capacity through acquisitions and capacity enhancement as it faces competition from billionaire Gautam Adani-led Adani Group's Ambuja cement, which is the second largest player and is also scaling up its capacity.

Over the cost of acquisition or the price at which shares are acquired, UltraTech ssaid it will "not exceed Rs 851 crore". *—PTI*

Markets settle higher on buying in bank, auto stocks

MUMBAI, 27 DEC

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended higher on Friday amid buying in bank and auto stocks.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 226.59 points or 0.29 per cent to settle at 78,699.07. During the day, it jumped 570.67 points or 0.72 per cent to 79,043.15.

The NSE Nifty went up by 63.20 points or 0.27 per cent to 23,813.40.

From the 30 blue-chip pack, Mahindra & Mahindra, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance, Tata Motors, Bajaj Finserv, Nestle and ICICI Bank were the biggest gainers.

State Bank of India, Tata Steel, Adani Ports, Zomato, UltraTech Cement and HCL Tech were among the laggards.

- 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 226.59 points or 0.29 per cent to settle at 78,699.07. During the day, it jumped 570.67 points or 0.72 per cent to 79,043.15

In Asian markets, Tokyo and Shanghai settled higher while Seoul and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading in the positive territory.

US markets ended on a flat note on Thursday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.18 per cent to USD 73.39 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,376.67 crore on Thursday.

BSE benchmark dipped 0.39 points to settle at 78,472.48 in a muted trade on Thursday. Nifty eked out gains of 22.55 points or 0.1 per cent to 23,750.20. *—PTI*

Adani orders eight tugs for ₹450 cr for Cochin Shipyard

AHMEDABAD, 27 DEC

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) has announced a significant order for the construction of eight advanced harbour tugs from Cochin Shipyard Ltd, with a total contract value of approximately INR 450 crore. The delivery of these tugs is expected to commence in December 2026 and continue until May 2028, aiming to enhance operational efficiency and safety at Indian ports.

This procurement initiative aligns with the Indian government's Make in India and Aatmanirbhar Bharat campaigns, promoting local manufacturing and bolstering self-reliance in the maritime sector. The new tugs, each with a bollard pull of 70 tonnes, will expand Adani's fleet to a total of 152 vessels.

New tugs will expand Adani's fleet to total of 152 vessels PHOTO: X

This further highlights the strategic significance of the maritime industry in India's economic growth and emphasis on shipbuilding practices. *—ANI*

India restricts import of low ash metallurgical coke

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

India has decided to put restrictions on imports of certain low ash metallurgical coke, as per a notification from the Directorate General of Foreign Trade.

Imports will only be permitted against an import authorisation issued by DGFT for the specified country for imports from January to June 2025.

Metallurgical coke with high ash content, that is ash content above 18 per cent is outside the scope of restriction.

"The country-wise quantitative restrictions shall be effective for a period of six months only and will cease automatically on 30.06.2025. Further, the central government reserves the right to review and make any changes in the said safeguard measures at any point of time, as deemed fit," the notification dated December 26 read.

The country-wise restrictions are 51,276 tonne for Australia, 78,646 tonne for China, 249,771 tonne for Colombia, 66,364 tonne for Indonesia, 209,980 tonne for Japan, 506,336 tonne for Poland, 1620 tonne for Qatar, 89,182 tonne for Russia, 46,478 tonne for Singapore, 81774 tonne for Switzerland, 76 tonne for the UK, and 45662 for others.

Most metallurgical coke is used in ferroy-alloy manufacturing. *—ANI*

PSUs on track for record profits amid strong credit growth

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

Public sector banks (PSBs) are poised to surpass the Rs 1.5 lakh crore profit mark in the financial year 2024-25, buoyed by low non-performing assets (NPAs) and robust double-digit credit growth.

In the first half of the fiscal year 2024-25, PSBs reported a 25 per cent increase in net profit, reaching 85,520 crore, compared to Rs 68,500 crore in H1 FY23. This upward trend is expected to continue in the second half, following a record aggregate net profit of Rs 1.41 lakh crore in 2023-24, driven by improved asset quality and capital adequacy.

The Gross NPA ratio of PSBs fell dramatically to 3.12 per cent in September 2024, down from a peak of 14.58 per cent in March 2018, reflecting effective interventions to address banking sector stress. Additionally, the Capital to Risk (Weighted) Assets Ratio (CRAR) increased to 15.43 per cent, significantly exceeding the Reserve Bank of India's minimum requirement of 11.5 per cent.

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Despite these positives, banks face challenges, including a slower deposit growth of 11.6 per cent compared to 12.4 per cent credit growth as of November 15, 2024, and rising incidences of digital fraud. Cyber scams have reportedly led to customer losses of Rs 11,333 crore in the first nine months of 2024.

To combat digital fraud, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged enhanced vigilance from consumers and collaboration between banks and law enforcement agencies. The Reserve Bank of India is pioneering initiatives like the AI/ML-based model MuleHunter.AITM to improve fraud prevention measures. *—PTI*

Coal exchange boosts output to meet demand

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

India's coal sector is set for significant activity in the upcoming year, with plans to launch the country's first coal exchange and enhance trading and pricing mechanisms for the vital dry fuel. The government is prioritising coal gasification, a cleaner alternative to traditional coal burning, to support the nation's energy transition.

Rupinder Brar, Additional Secretary in the coal ministry, highlighted the escalating demand for coal driven by India's growing economy. The government is focused on boosting coal output while ensuring it aligns with this demand. "We are working towards a sustainable coal sector that balances environmental concerns with the needs of coal-dependent communities," she stated.

Recent figures indicate a 6.21 per cent increase in cumulative coal production to 628.03 million tonnes during the April-November period of the current fiscal year. Analysts from Deloitte India predict an 8-10 per cent growth in thermal coal production, largely attributed to rising electricity consumption. *—PTI*

Hero Future Energies commissions 29 MW solar project in Karnataka

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

Hero Future Energies (HFE) has officially commissioned a 29 MW solar project in Chitradurga, Karnataka, aimed at supplying renewable energy to the Commercial and Industrial (C&I) sector. The initiative is expected to generate approximately 33 million units of green energy annually, contributing to a reduction of 31,624 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions.

Srivatsan Iyer, Global CEO of Hero Future Energies, stated, "This project represents another significant milestone in our open access initiatives, expanding our presence in Karnataka and reaffirming our commitment to industrial decarbonisation. Our aim is to empower businesses and communities, serving as a comprehensive partner in their net-zero journeys."

In addition to this project, HFE recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Karnataka, committing Rs 11,000 crore for investments in renewable energy and green hydrogen projects across the state. HFE is the renewable energy arm of the Hero Group and is supported by global investors, including International Finance Corporation (IFC) and KKR. *—PTI*

AMID GLOBAL TURMOIL

Recovery in developed mkts enhances 2025 export prospects

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

India's manufacturing prowess, particularly in high-value sectors like machinery and electronics, is bolstering the nation's exports despite ongoing global uncertainties stemming from conflicts. Trade experts predict improved prospects for Indian exporters in 2025, especially if the new US administration increases tariffs on China, Mexico, and Canada, potentially providing Indian exporters with a competitive edge.

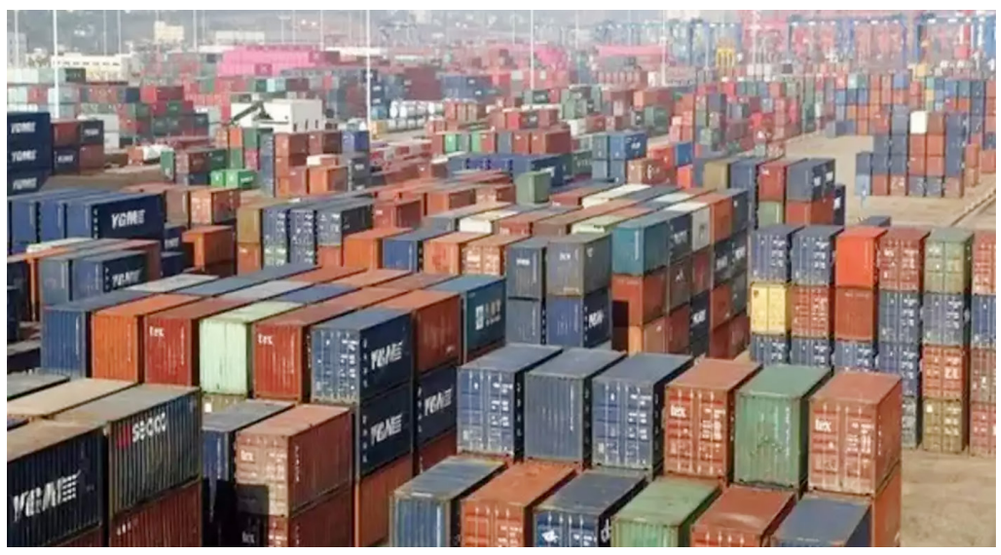
Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal expressed optimism for India's exporting community, anticipating goods and services exports could exceed USD 800 billion in 2024-25, up from USD 778 billion in 2023-24. During April-November this fiscal year, exports rose by 2.17 per cent to USD 284.31 billion, while imports climbed 8.35 per cent to USD 486.73 billion, widening the trade deficit to USD 202.42 billion.

The European Union's forthcoming Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and new deforestation regulations pose challenges, threatening to escalate export costs and complicate trade negotiations. Meanwhile, the Indian government is strategising to enhance exports of six key categories, including engineering goods and electronics, targeting 20 focus countries such as the US, Australia, and China.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) projects India's total exports, combining merchandise and services, to surpass USD 814 billion in 2024, reflecting a 5.58 per cent growth. The electronics sector, rising from 3.3 per cent of exports in 2014 to an anticipated 7.9 per cent in 2024, highlights India's shift towards higher-value exports. Conversely, traditional sectors like textiles are declining, necessitating urgent support to enhance competitiveness.

Economist Rumki Majumdar of Deloitte India stresses the need for India to diversify its markets and offerings, particularly as the US focuses on domestic manufacturing. Strengthening local talent, addressing skill gaps, and fostering innovation remain crucial for enhancing export capabilities.

The Geneva-based WTO has reduced its trade growth forecast for 2025 to 3 per cent, signalling potential challenges ahead for global trade dynamics. *—PTI*



Trade experts predict improved prospects for Indian exporters in 2025, especially if the new US administration increases tariffs on China, Mexico, and Canada PHOTO: ANI

India end Day 2 at 164/5, trail Australia by 310 runs

Collapse unfolded after Jaiswal's inexplicable run-out

The Indian men's and women's cricket teams sported black armbands in their respective matches on Friday to honour former prime minister Manmohan Singh, who died in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

MELBOURNE, 27 DEC

India reached 164 for five at stumps on day two, trailing Australia by 310 runs in the fourth Test here on Friday.

Skipper Rohit Sharma (3) fell cheaply once again before Yashasvi Jaiswal (82) and Virat Kohli (36) steadied the ship with a 102-run stand.

Jaiswal was run out following a mix up with Kohli, who was caught behind in the following over.

Australia were all out after lunch with Steve Smith scoring his 34th Test hundred.

Resuming at their overnight score of 311 for six, the hosts added 163 runs on the day to post a commanding total.

For India, Jasprit Bumrah (4/99) and Ravindra Jadeja (3/78) shared seven wickets between them while Akash Deep (2/94) had two scalps.

A familiar collapse unfolded after Yashasvi Jaiswal's inexplicable run-out as India stared down the barrel at 164/5.

Jaiswal, who was quite fluent during his 118-ball stay that yielded 82 runs, was way short of his crease after a mix-up with Virat Kohli (36) while attempting a quick single, handing Australia the breakthrough that could prove decisive.

In a space of barely five minutes, cricket showed its fickle nature as Jaiswal pushed towards mid-on and called for a quick single with an assured Kohli (36) at the other end. Kohli took a step and half before retreating.

The Jaiswal-Kohli pair had added 102 runs and looked comfortable just like they did in the Perth second innings. The ball hardly did anything after Rohit Sharma (3) played a poor shot and KL Rahul got a ripper from Cummins. *—PTI*

Will Rohit bench himself before Sydney Test?

MELBOURNE, 27 DEC

Rohit Sharma seems to have nothing left in the tank.

"Tough times for him," the legendary Sunil Gavaskar said while on air with broadcasters '7Cricket'.

"There will be a second innings and two more in Sydney. Questions will be asked if he doesn't score in those three innings," Gavaskar said on air as he saw it.

After yet another cheap dismissal off a Pat Cummins' short ball, questions are mounting on when the 38-year-old Indian captain will finally call time on his Test career.

But will Rohit allow all these questions to fester? The national selection committee chairman Ajit Agarkar is in Melbourne and it won't surprise anyone if it comes out that the two former teammates have had some discussions on the future as India copes with a tough transition.

Only 155 runs in eight Tests at an average of 11.07 in 14 innings is very poor by all standards and not scoring runs after tinkering a set opening combination hasn't done him any good. *—PTI*

GAVASKAR: KOHLI NOT LET OFF LIGHTLY; AUSSIES DISAGREE

MELBOURNE, 27 DEC

Virat Kohli was not extended any special treatment, asserted Indian great Sunil Gavaskar but some former Australian players felt the batting superstar got away lightly for his physical altercation with debutant Sam Konstas in the ongoing Boxing Day Test here.

The showdown remained a talking point even on Friday with Gavaskar slamming the Australian media for going after Kohli and demanding harsher punishment for him.

"You can't hang a man for picking someone's pocket," Gavaskar remarked, dismissing claims that Kohli was let off lightly.

"So, it's not that he's been done any favour. If the final punishment would have been say 10 percent you could have said then there's a favour done," he added.

Criticising the Australian media, Gavaskar said, "The Australian media acts like their 12th or 13th player, targeting anyone they perceive as a threat to their team.

"They are asking that Kohli should be hanged for a minor offence and he's got away because he is Kohli but that's not it."

However, former Australia skipper Ricky Ponting argued that the punishment was insufficient. *— PTI*

Physical contact on field a no-no: Cricket Aus CEO

MELBOURNE, 27 DEC

Cricket Australia CEO Nick Hockley on Friday said there is no place for physical contact on the cricket field, following the face-off between India superstar Virat Kohli and Australian debutant Sam Konstas.

The brief showdown took place after the 10th over of the Australian innings on the opening day of the fourth Test when the players were crossing over. Kohli and Konstas bumped shoulders while moving across the pitch in the face off that was initiated by the travelling star.

Kohli was charged with breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct and accepted the sanctions proposed by match referee Andy Pycroft. "Not a great look I mean you know physical contact on the cricket field is a complete no-no so it wasn't great," Hockley told SEN Radio.

"I think clearly Virat in accepting the charge has taken responsibility," he added.

Konstas downplayed the incident, explaining that Kohli had accidentally bumped into him, a response Hockley considered mature for a teenager. *—PTI*

Kohli jeered, invader tries to embrace him

A pitch invader ran onto the field and tried to hug Indian batting star Virat Kohli in an unexpected disruption on Day 2 of the Boxing Day Test at MCG. Kohli was also booed and jeered while walking back to dressing room after his dismissal, prompting him to turn around for a brief stand-off with the fans. Kohli strode back after hearing something that was not audible.

Sanjay Takale to make historic Dakar rally debut

PUNE, 27 DEC

Rally driver Sanjay Takale is poised to become the first Indian to compete in the four-wheel section of any class at the Dakar Rally, set to take place in Saudi Arabia from 3 to 17 January 2025. Takale, who previously made history by winning the Asia Pacific Rally Championship (APRC) production class, will race a Toyota Land Cruiser HZJ78 in the 2025 Dakar Classic alongside his French co-driver Maxime Raud. The grueling event spans 14 days and covers over 8,000 km, including 5,000 km across 12 special stages. "My goal is to experience the might of Dakar and have fun driving in the dunes," said Takale. *—PTI*

Sporting Lisbon sacks coach just 6 weeks after hiring

LISBON, 27 DEC

The successor to Ruben Amorim at Sporting Lisbon lasted just six weeks. João Pereira, who was hired on Nov. 11 following the departure of Amorim to Manchester United, was fired on Thursday and has been replaced by Rui Borges from Vitoria de Guimaraes. Pereira had three spells at Sporting as a player and took over as coach with the team in first place in the Portuguese league and in second place in the revamped Champions League. Pereira won three of his eight games in charge, and included in that period was a 5-1 loss to Arsenal in the Champions League. *—PTI*

MCC honours Tendulkar with club membership

MELBOURNE, 27 DEC

Melbourne Cricket Club (MCC) on Friday said Indian icon Sachin Tendulkar has accepted its invitation to become an honourary member of the prestigious institution. Founded in 1838, the MCC is one of the oldest sports clubs in Australia and is responsible for the management and development of the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), one of the game's premier venues. "An icon honoured. The legendary Tendulkar currently holds the record of most runs at MCG with 449 from five Tests at an average of 44.90 and a strike-rate of 58.69. *—PTI*

India recovered after a top-order wobble to reach the target of 163 in 28.2 overs **PHOTO: TWITTER**

Deepti shines as India whitewash West Indies 3-0

VADODARA, 27 DEC

Senior off-spinner Deepti Sharma did the star turn with career-best figures of 6/31 before doing her bit with the bat as India completed a 3-0 whitewash of the West Indies with a five-wicket victory in the final Women's ODI here on Friday.

Having bowled out West Indies for 162 after Deepti's superlative performance and pacer Renuka Singh's (4/29) excellent show with the new ball, India recovered after a top-order wobble to reach the target of 163 in 28.2 overs.

India were in a spot of bother at 73/4 but Deepti (39 not out in 48 balls) used all her experience to see the team through with plenty of overs remaining.

Swashbuckling wicketkeeper-batter Richa Ghosh was unbeaten on an 11-ball 23 when the winning runs were scored.

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, who eased nerves with two boundaries after last match centurion Harleen Deol's (1) dismissal left India at 23/2, blazed away to a 22-ball 32 before getting bowled by Afy Fletcher.

During her breezy knock, Kaur smashed seven boundaries and looked good for a big one before getting dismissed.

In-form opener Smriti Mandhana (4) departed early as Ashmini Munisar completed a strange one-handed catch after appearing to have misjudged what should actually have been a straightforward catch off the bowling of Aaliyah Alleyne.

Enjoying a good run of form in recent times, vice-captain Mandhana did not get to the pitch of the ball on the day and paid the price. *—PTI*

Arjun tied for 5th at World Rapid chess

NEW YORK, 27 DEC

Arjun Erigaisi, the Indian Grandmaster, made a strong start at the World Rapid Chess Championship in New York, securing four wins and one loss to tie for fifth place. Defending champion Magnus Carlsen of Norway experienced a challenging day, managing only one victory alongside three draws and a loss to Russian Denis Lazavik.

In a standout moment for Indian chess, 13-year-old Raunak Sadhwani triumphed over pre-event favourite Alireza Firouzja from France, displaying his considerable promise. After five rounds, the championship, featuring a prize pool of $550,000, sees Murzin Volodar of Russia, Shant Sargsyan of Armenia, and American pair Daniel Naroditsky and Lenier Dominguez Perez leading with 4.5 points each. Both Erigaisi and Sadhwani follow closely behind, tied among 11 players with four points.

In the women's section, local star Alice Lee emerged as the player to watch with four consecutive victories. She faces stiff competition from world champion Wenjun Ju of China, Zhongyi Tan, and India's D Harika, all of whom have garnered 3.5 points. Koneru Humpy, the highest-rated player in the women's event, managed only 2.5 points and will need to catch up in the upcoming rounds. The rapid format features a 15-minute time control per game, with an additional 10 seconds after each move. Following the rapid rounds, the blitz championship will commence, with the top eight players qualifying for knockout rounds to determine the medalists. *—PTI*

Arjun Erigaisi **PHOTO: X**

Fernandes' red card, Haaland's penalty miss hurt City & United

MANCHESTER, 27 DEC

Manchester's football giants, City and United, faced another disappointing day in the Premier League as Erling Haaland's missed penalty and Bruno Fernandes' red card highlighted their ongoing struggles. City managed only a 1-1 draw at home against Everton, with Haaland's penalty saved by Jordan Pickford, and now finds itself in seventh place, having won just once in their last 13 matches across all competitions.

Manager Pep Guardiola admitted the need for reinforcements in the January transfer window to address their alarming decline. Meanwhile, United slumped to 14th after a 2-0 defeat at Wolverhampton, playing most of the second half with ten men following Fernandes' early sending-off. The defeat came as Wolves found their form under new manager Vitor Pereira, claiming their second consecutive victory. In stark contrast, Liverpool triumphed over Leicester 3-1 at Anfield, moving seven points clear at the top of the league. *—PTI*

City managed only a 1-1 draw against Everton, with Haaland's penalty saved by Jordan Pickford, and now finds itself in 7th place **PHOTO:**

Hockey League: SG Pipers to take on Gonasika

ROURKELA, 27 DEC

A new era in Indian hockey will be ushered in when the much-anticipated Hockey India League League (HIL) restarts with the opening clash between Delhi SG Pipers and Gonasika of Vizag here on Saturday.

The HIL is set to be revived in a new avatar after seven years with eight men's teams in the fray. The icing of the cake is the introduction of the women's league, comprising four teams, which will be played in Ranchi from 12 January.

The Birsa Munda Stadium will host the men's teams till the final on 1 February, while the women's teams will compete from 12 to 26 January in Ranchi. *—PTI*

ASIAN BOXING'S FUTURE

Lovlina, Ajay take key roles in Boxing Body

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

- This initiative is seen as a vital step towards ensuring that boxing remains part of the Olympic Games in Los Angeles 2028 and beyond

Tokyo Olympic medallist Lovlina Borgohain has been appointed to the Athletes' Commission of the newly-formed interim Asian boxing body established by the breakaway organisation, World Boxing (WB). Alongside her, six officials from the Boxing Federation of India (BFI), including President Ajay Singh, will occupy key positions within this new structure, crucial for shaping Asian boxing's future.

India's BFI holds seven significant roles, with Singh serving as a board member. This initiative is seen as a vital step towards ensuring that boxing remains part of the Olympic Games in Los Angeles 2028 and beyond. Singh expressed pride in India's central role in this transformative effort, aiming to secure boxing's Olympic future through strong representation across essential commissions.

Borgohain, one of three representatives in the Athletes' Commission, highlighted the importance of advocating for improved infrastructure and fair opportunities for athletes across Asia. She stated, "It is an honour to represent India... My focus will be on advocating for better training infrastructure and robust support systems that empower boxers to excel on the global stage."

Other BFI officials will serve on various commissions, including Narender Kumar Nirwan and DP Bhatt, who will join the Constitution and Sports & Competition Commissions, respectively, alongside Dr. Karanjeet Singh in the Medical Commission.

This announcement follows India's recent acquisition of hosting rights for the World Boxing Cup Final in November 2025 and the World Boxing Congress, amidst ongoing pressures from the International Olympic Committee regarding the withdrawal from the suspended International Boxing Association. *—PTI*

Lovlina Borgohain **PHOTO: PTI**

Chennaiyin FC eyes victory, HFC targets East Bengal

CHENNAI, 27 DEC

- Bengaluru come into the match as the second-placed side in the league, and Coyle is wary of the threat they carry, especially with the team missing key personnel

Chennaiyin FC will be aiming to rebound to winning form and finish the year on a positive note when they face Bengaluru FC in the Indian Super league here on Saturday.

In the day's other game, Hyderabad FC will host East Bengal FC with an aim to turn things around and halt the visitors' momentum.

Chennaiyin and Bengaluru have played each other 15 times in the ISL, with the former winning four matches. This corresponding fixture last year produced a 2-0 win for the Marina Machans and head coach Owen Coyle will be eyeing the same this time.

However, the tactician will be without captain Ryan Edwards, who is suspended for the match, and is expected to field an all-Indian backline.

Bengaluru come into the match as the second-placed side in the league, and Coyle is wary of the threat they carry, especially with the team missing key personnel.

This will be the ninth ISL meeting between the two sides, with East Bengal FC aiming to continue their recent dominance over Hyderabad FC.

East Bengal FC have won their last two ISL matches against Hyderabad FC, including a league double in the 2023-24 season. *—PTI*